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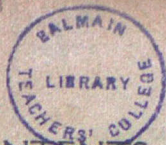
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Robinson's ducks, by Arthur Wright



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CHAPTER I.

DOODS DIXON, THE SILVER KING.

SO long as horses race at Randwick, there will the sporting public foregather in its thousands to participate in the game it loves so well. An ordinary meeting at headquarters always draws a good attendance; but, on a day when one of the great equine events of the year is to be decided, tens of thousands of Australia's sons and daughters testify by their presence that the King of Sports still holds first place in the hearts of the children of the Commonwealth.

Derby Day, 19—, was no exception to the rule, and a record crowd was present to witness the battles for the Derby and the richly endowed Epsom Mile. On the flat the crush was great, indeed, and patrons of the shilling enclosure found a difficulty in moving about or backing their fancies.

Time was when the historic "flat" was somewhat different to what it is nowadays. Then, many side shows flourished for the entertainment of visitors. Aunt Sallies, skittles, and many other games were freely indulged in. Yankee sweat, monkey and goose sweeps, spinning jennies, and other so-called games of chance went on unchecked, while exponents of the purse trick, manipulators of the three cards and the nimble pea waxed fat on the money of the foolish.

Now, the business of betting alone occupies the attention of the habitue of the flat, and side-shows are neglected. True, the monte man (with his following of buttoners) still works hard to make an honest crust, but the breed of "mugs" on whom he lives, if not quite extinct, has lessened considerably. It follows that his profits must be very small—hardly worth the risk he runs by indulging in his unlawful occupation.

All classes of the community seemed to be congregated on the flat on this particular Derby Day; all sorts of vehicles lined the rails—dealers' vans, that had brought loads of men from suburbs where "pushes" predominate; delivery carts with cargoes of friends from city warehouse or factory; sulkies and buggies occupied by husbands with their wives and families.

Shabby, unwashed won't-workers were there rubbing shoulders with respectable, hard-working men, clerks, and shop assistants. Many were attired in the garb of fashion, and, though paying but a shilling to enter the enclosure, were speculating in sovereigns.

A large number of bookmakers, loud of voice, plied their calling, and all were gathering in a great quantity of coins of the realm—mostly silver. All seemed good-tempered and jolly, and exchanged pleasantries with their customers.

One man in particular was doing a roaring trade. A large crowd jostled and struggled to invest with him. An assistant stood on either side, one entering the bets in his book, and the other handing out change. All three were coatless and perspiring with their exertions. Each wore a tall, white hat, to which was attached a card bearing the name "Doods Dixon, The Silver King," that name being also emblazoned on the large bag hanging in front of the bookmaker himself. He

was a sturdily-built man of medium height, dark complexioned, with a black moustache and pointed beard, his hair also being black and luxuriant. A pair of coloured glasses hid his eyes effectually. His teeth were white and regular, though two in front were missing, leaving an ugly gap.

With blue pencil in one hand and a bundle of tickets in the other, he shouted the odds, and the money rolled in in a never-ending stream. Though styling himself the Silver King, gold in any amount was welcomed, and Dixon, though preferring to do business on the flat, was quite prepared to bet on a scale that would put many of the wielders of the pencil operating in the paddock to shame.

This man Dixon was something of a puzzle to the racing fraternity. Coming from no one knew where but a twelvemonth ago, he had taken up his stand on the flat, and called the odds. For a time the regulars had left him alone, and he made but little headway. Persisting, he laid "over the odds" prices, always paid out smilingly, and soon his business increased until he became the leviathan of the flat. He was in his place regularly every Saturday wherever races were being held; but between Saturday and Saturday he was rarely seen. The haunts of the "sport" knew him not during the week, and many were the surmises as to what became of Doods Dixon in the interval. He was also supposed to interest himself in the running of horses, and it was whispered that he had some connection with Roger Fenton, the Randwick trainer; but no one said it openly, for no one seemed to know the truth of the matter.

To-day things were going well with him. Favourites were being beaten, and his bags were heavy with the

punters' lost coin; so his voice was jubilant as he shouted the prices on the Epsom.

"Ca' on; give it er name; any price some of these outsiders. Six t' one th' field—sixes the field; eight t' one bar Bold Jack. Twenty t' one some of these runners. Ca' on; a run fer yer money, if yer have t' chase me over th' fence. Twenties Colonial Boy! Chuck it in—that's right. Now don't get excited; y'll all get on; I'll bet the lot of you if y'll only give me a chance."

All the time he was talking he was taking shillings, half-crowns, half-sovereigns, and sovereigns from eager, excited backers, and handing them tickets in exchange. His clerk was gallantly making his pencil fly in his efforts to enter up the bets correctly, and the man with the change bag also had his work cut out to keep his end up. Seemingly, Doods Dixon was—in the vernacular—"on a real good wicket," and was making the most of it.

Behind the busy bookmaker a man stood upon a box, a racebook in his hand, and his gaze fixed on the paddock enclosure opposite. Presently he raised his arm and waved the book, in answer to a signal from the lawn. Then, after a series of signals, he whispered in the ear of Dixon. Thus, by a system of "tick-tacking," the state of the betting market in the paddock was conveyed to Dixon, who varied his prices accordingly.

Roger Fenton's horse, Momus, had been made a hot favourite "inside." The news had spread as if by magic to the "flat." Backers, who had long waited for this horse—a reputed good thing—to sport silk, were eager to get on at a fair price. The "books" were just as eager not to offer a price, and all around "two to one the field" was the cry that greeted the disgusted punters.

There was one exception, however. Above the roar of the ring arose the voice of Doods Dixon. "Five t' one th' field; fives Momus!" he shouted; and not in vain. Around him surged a struggling mass of humanity with hands outstretched, offering gold and silver.

"Steady there; keep cool. I'll bet th' lot of y's!" he cried, and he was literally swamped with an embarrassment of riches. Notes, gold, and silver he received as quickly as he could grasp them, and though at last he dropped the price to three to one, the money continued to come for Momus.

A young man, tall and well dressed, had elbowed his way through the crowd, and stood looking over the shoulder of Dixon's clerk as he entered up the bets. His presence appeared to greatly annoy Dixon, who at last said, angrily, "Do yer want anything? Yer be'n looking there long enough. If yer want t' bet, put it on; if yer don't, get out of it."

"Don't get excited," said the young man, quietly. "I've seen all I require, thanks." He made his way out of the crush followed by a look of fierce hate from the apparently genial bookmaker.

He joined a friend, and together they walked away. "Well, what do you make of it, Ken?" asked the friend.

"I'm afraid it's all up with Momus. The horse can win, but it seems to me that this Dixon knows that he won't by the way he is laying against him."

"Oh, he always bets over the odds," said Duncan.

"He knows what he is doing," returned Curtis. "I have interested myself in Fenton's affairs of late, for Vera's sake, and I've discovered what others only suspect—that Fenton and his horses are really controlled

by Dixon. Fenton is in difficulties, and looks to Momus to set him right again. He has backed his horse for all he can raise, and, if it loses, he is ruined."

"And you think that Dixon wishes to crush Fenton?" asked Fred Duncan.

"I do. He has led the old man to believe that he has backed Momus heavily, and wants him to win; but, from what I have just seen, it seems to be the other way about."

"It's damnable, if you are right; but it's too late now to do anything," said Duncan. "Anyhow, I hope it is not so bad as you think. Hello! they're off! Come on; let's see a bit of the race."

The two young men ran up on to the slight rise in the centre of the course, and, scrambling up on to a steeple-chase jump, watched the large field of horses as it swept along the course on its way to the turn.

"Why, Momus is in front; it's any odds on him. I told you you were making a mistake!" cried Fred Duncan.

"May he keep there!" said Ken Curtis earnestly; but as he spoke the field closed up, Momus suddenly disappeared, and a roar announced the favourite's defeat, as the horses turned into the straight with Colonial Boy at their head.

Kendall Curtis watched Momus intently. He had become buried in the ruck, but did not appear to be beaten. In the straight his rider made as if to come through on the rails, where there was no opening. Momus threw up his head, and lost ground, and then the jockey took him to the outside and started to ride a desperate race after Colonial Boy, who was well to the front. In a few moments all was over, the outsider winning easily. Momus finished a bad third, and re-

turned to the weighing enclosure to the accompaniment of hoots and shouts of anger.

"Dead strong!" "Never tried a yard!" "Ought to get life!" were remarks that Ken Curtis and his friend heard on all sides.

Curtis sighed. "Poor Fenton," he said. "This will about settle him."

"It's a bad job," said Duncan; "but, of course, it will not affect you and Vera?"

"I should hope not, indeed," answered Ken. "Only perhaps hurry on the wedding; for they will lose their old home now, I suppose."

As they passed Doods Dixon he was shouting as he stood with his well-filled bag, "Pay this winner. Ca' on, I'll pay!" but no one responded to his call. The winner was a complete outsider, and all the wealth was Dixon's.

He looked at Curtis, and a grin as if of triumph distorted his features.

"There's something about that damned fellow that seems strangely familiar to me," remarked Ken. "I've been wondering if I ever knew him before."

"Met in a previous state of existence," suggested Fred, as they passed on."

Over in the stewards' room a grey-haired man stood, with trembling limbs and bowed head, before the racing tribunal. He had been called upon to explain the running of his horse, Momus, in the Epsom Handicap. He had told his story, but his word was doubted. His very manner betokened his guilt. At last the verdict was spoken, and, scarcely able to move his powerless limbs, he dragged himself away. After a thirty years' untarnished record there had come to Roger Fenton dishonour, shame, ruin. For twelve months he would be

debarred from following his calling as trainer, from racing his horses, or in any way taking part in the sport he had followed all his life.

Quickly the word travelled through the crowd. "Owner, jockey, and horse outed for twelve months," and the comment of the duped public was, "They ought to have got life."

CHAPTER II.

HORACE WAKEMAN'S OFFER.

AT the intersection of Oxford street with one of the thoroughfares leading to the waterside, on the night of Epsom Day, a small crowd had assembled.

Seated at a piano-organ in the centre of the crowd was a young lady. Around her stood a number of sour-visaged, smileless men and women, hymn-book in hand.

These good people professed to have found the only true happiness. They were "saved," so they averred; but it would appear, rather, that all the sweetness of life had been squeezed from their nature, leaving them dry, hard-featured, and sour.

The girl in their midst looked strangely out of place. She was sweet and beautiful to look upon. Her dress consisted of a simple costume of some grey material. A luxuriant mass of wavy light-brown hair covered a small and shapely head, while her cheeks, which glowed with the bloom of health, blended the dainty, peach-and-white complexion of the English girl with the sun-kissed tints of the Australian maiden—a composite picture of old-world beauty and the active, happy, warm-blooded charms of a daughter of the Sunny South.

She was Vera Fenton, only child of Roger Fenton, of Randwick, trainer and owner of racehorses.

Brought up in an environment of sport, Vera was fond of all healthy amusements that go to make life worth living. She was equally at home on top of a horse or shooting the breakers on the ocean beach; but, recently, she had turned to more serious matters.

She realised that while she lived a life of happiness many were in a state of want. That, though to her all things had seemed good and pure, many of her own sex lived in sin and wretchedness. That, while the sport of racing, on which her father lived, meant wealth and joy to a few, by its abuse many were reduced to poverty or driven to crime. These things had been made evident to her by a man, one Horace Wakeman. For a time himself a gambler, he had suddenly renounced the turf as accursed, and become religious. During his racing career he had made Roger Fenton's acquaintance, and had fallen under the spell of Vera's girlish charms. Ere long he made known his feelings; but the girl told him that what he desired could not be. "She did not love him," she said, "and was the promised bride of another—Kendall Curtis—to whom she had given her heart."

Wakeman took his repulse resignedly. He appeared to bow to the inevitable, and, dropping the role of lover, assumed that of friend. And Vera, who thought she liked the man, though love him she could not, was not sorry that the friendship was to continue.

Truth to tell, Wakeman exercised some strange influence over her, and seemed at times able to bend her to his will. Thus, when he turned to religion, he sought to sway her mind in that direction also. He succeeded so well that Vera consented to join a little mission society, whose well-meaning members went forth into the highways and slums, preaching, singing,

and collecting with the object of saving sinners, with, 'tis to be feared, but little success.

This was why Vera was out in the street that night. Horace Wakeman was there also; a well-built man of medium height, age anything between thirty and forty-five, and well dressed in dark clothes of semi-clerical cut. Dark complexioned, clean-shaven, with short-cropped hair, features irregular and far from handsome, the mouth being large and filled with a faultless set of teeth, his eyes alone, large and bright, lending an air of distinction to the face. He stood by Vera Fenton's side and read aloud the words of a hymn. Then the girl touched the keys of her instrument, and a dozen voices were uplifted in song. Vera's voice, ringing out musically above the mournful tones of her companions, caused many to pause and listen, until the small crowd swelled into a large one.

The hymn being over, Wakeman stepped forward and addressed the people. He began with the usual story of how glad he was that he was able to say that he was a saved man, and gradually worked on to the subject of horse-racing and gambling. Speaking as one having a more than hearsay knowledge, he denounced what he termed "this soul-destroying vice" with earnest eloquence, and appealed to his hearers to turn from the sin of betting and seek joy and salvation by becoming "saved." He concluded with prayer, and though other speakers followed him, the crowd faded away, and the collection was not a large one.

At last the service was over, the hymn and prayer books were gathered up, two of the saved ones carried off the piano-organ, and the rest followed, Horace Wakeman lingering behind with Vera Fenton.

"Where is Curtis to-night?" asked Wakeman. "He surely has not forgotten to come for you?"

"Oh, no," said Vera; "he would be here only that I asked him to stay with father till I came home. Poor father is upset and worried dreadfully. I should not have left him only that Ken was there, and that I had promised to come to the meeting to-night."

"Then, for once, I may be granted the privilege of seeing you home?" murmured Wakeman.

"Oh, you need not mind, thank you," answered Vera. "I shall be all right. I want to get home quickly, as I fear that father may want me."

"I could not hear of you going alone," said Wakeman. "Come, we will hurry; I will call a cab."

"No, no!" protested Vera; "the tram will do."

Together they walked along to Darlinghurst, there to take a car for Randwick.

"You spoke of your father being worried," remarked Wakeman; "What is the trouble? Can I do anything?"

"Oh, did you not know? I thought everyone would have heard of the thing," said Vera. "We are disgraced—ruined. Oh!——"

"The awful racing curse again, I presume?"

"Call it so if you like," answered Vera hotly; "but the curse exists not in the sport itself, but in the unscrupulous men who have become connected with it, ruining by their villany honest men, who, unknowingly, become their victims. It has never before been a curse to my father. He has not attained wealth by its aid, but he has earned an honest living as a trainer, and has always been able to hold his head up amongst his fellow-men, ashamed of nothing."

"And now?" sighed Wakeman.

"Now he is degraded, humiliated, and robbed of his means of livelihood. He, who never did a wrong thing, disqualified for corrupt practices." "

"But how? I don't quite understand. Was there some mistake, or——" began the man.

"Dad's horse was favourite for the Epsom," said Vera impatiently. "It could have won. Father put every penny he could raise on it. It did not win; it was not allowed to. Father was robbed, and has been branded as a rogue and a thief into the bargain."

"Shameful! Shameful!" murmured Wakeman, "but what can one expect? It is in keeping with the whole history of a corrupt pastime of the devil, mis-named sport."

Vera looked at her companion with an expression of indignant scorn in her eyes. It was plain that her connection with religion had not lessened her love for the sport with which she was so intimately acquainted. An angry retort in its defence sprang to her lips, but the tram arriving at the moment, it remained unspoken, and the subject was not discussed during the journey.

Arrived at the stopping place nearest to Vera's home, Wakeman alighted, and assisted Vera from the car. They had some distance to go, and their way lay along a deserted road but little built on.

Vera looked about as if expecting some one to meet her. No one appearing, she accepted Wakeman's proffered arm, and they proceeded homeward.

"And your father being innocent, have you any idea who has caused his trouble?" asked Wakeman, reverting to their former conversation.

"More than an idea; a certainty," said Vera; "but that knowledge will not mend matters. I know I can speak openly to you, Mr. Wakeman. Father somehow

allowed himself to get into the hands of a bookmaker—a rascally brute called Doods Dixon. This man holds a mortgage over everything we possess—house, stables, horses—all now belong to him. He is at the bottom of our trouble. It was he who wished Momus kept for the Epsom; he who led father to believe he had backed it heavily; he who selected the jockey to ride it. Dad, all unsuspecting, backed it, and induced his friends to back it; but this scoundrel Dixon willed that the horse should not win. He easily found tools to do his dirty work, and I hope he is satisfied; but if only I was a man, I'd thrash the scoundrel to within an inch of his life, and I'd never rest until I forced the truth from him or stretched him dead at my feet."

Wakeman regarded the girl with a queer look in his eyes, and a smile upon his lips.

"Revenge! Ah, no," he murmured in his most sanctimonious manner. "Rather should we forgive."

Vera did not answer.

They proceeded in silence for a short distance, and then Wakeman, pausing suddenly, and retaining Vera's hand, said, "Miss Fenton—Vera, I have something to say to you. I am bound by a solemn promise not to speak to you of my true feelings towards you, but the trouble that has come upon you must cause me to break my word. I——"

"Mr. Wakeman, I will not listen to you; you seem to forget——"

"I forget nothing; but I cannot give up all hope. I have tried to force back my love for you, but it will not be kept down. Could I see you and hear your voice, and forget at our meetings, when we have knelt side by side in prayer, or lifted up our voices praising the Lord in song—do you think my thoughts have been

of God? Ah, no! You—you! have been always uppermost in my mind. You, for whom I would give up everything on earth and deny even the Lord Himself——”

“Mr. Wakeman, let us get on; I——” gasped Vera.

“Why throw yourself away on this penniless clerk, Curtis?” he continued, not heeding her entreaty. “I had bowed to your verdict, and tried not to covet the prize that he had won, but now that trouble has come to you, I know that he cannot help you. What kind of a home can he give to you and your unfortunate father? He is totally dependent on his salary, and I could cast him adrift to-morrow did I so wish.”

“Mr. Wakeman!” pleaded Vera.

“One moment. Your father wants a friend; he wants money to keep a roof over his head, and retain his horses. I have money—more than people dream of. I have influence also. I will buy this man Dixon off, release the mortgage, have a fresh inquiry into the running of Momus, and, perhaps—who knows?—find out the truth, and clear your father’s name. I——”

“You will do this, Mr. Wakeman?” cried Vera.

“Aye, and more if necessary,” he replied, “on one condition—that you become my wife.”

Vera shrank away with a gasp of despair. “Impossible!” she moaned.

“It is not. Think what it means to your father. Would you not make a sacrifice for him? And what is the sacrifice after all? Am I not as good a man as Curtis? I have health, strength, position, and, what he has not—wealth. I could make you far happier than he can ever hope to.”

Vera was silent.

“Your answer?” urged Wakeman.

"I will not give up Kendall Curtis for you!" she cried. "I will starve first!"

"We shall see," he sneered. "Ah, here's your hero now, I think."

Some one was approaching, and the light from a street lamp showed that it was Ken Curtis.

"Hello, Vera! Back at last!" he exclaimed. "The dad was getting uneasy, and sent me to meet you. He has not much faith in the saintly company you are keeping—present company, of course, excepted," he added quickly, looking at Wakeman.

"Miss Fenton is quite safe in my company, or that of my friends," said Wakeman, coldly.

"Of course she is," cried Ken. "I'm sorry you have had this trip, though, Mr. Wakeman. I would have been down for Vera as usual, only that her father was not well, and she wished me to stay with him."

"It has been a pleasure to escort Miss Fenton home," said Wakeman. "And, now that I am so near, I will go along and see Mr. Fenton. Poor fellow! he must be sadly in need of consolation."

Ken drew Vera's arm within his, and felt that she was trembling, and, glancing at her, he saw that she was as pale as death. "Are you ill, dear?" he whispered gently; but she only shook her head, and in a few minutes they arrived at Roger Fenton's home.

Fenton was seated in the small sitting-room, looking pale and worried. The events of the day had changed him remarkably. Years seemed to have been added to his age, and lines of care, unnoticed before, showed out plainly on his forehead and around his eyes and mouth.

He did not appear pleased at the intrusion of Horace Wakeman, and rose to leave the room.

"I am sorry to hear of your misfortune, Mr. Fenton," said Wakeman, "and I would be glad to try and soften the blow somewhat."

"It's all right," said Fenton. "I've had a bit of bad luck, but I'll get over it, I suppose; and if you're going to come the sermon or prayer racket on me, I'm not taking any."

"That is not my intention," returned Wakeman; "but if you will give me a few minutes in private, I may be able to make the future appear a little more bright."

Vera and Curtis having left the room, Fenton re-seated himself. "Go on," he said, with a sigh; "no one will bother us here."

"You've had a hard knock, I believe," began Wakeman, "and are in danger of losing your home and——"

"Everything," broke in Fenton. "Not a stick I can call my own. I've not done too well of late, and, some time ago, I mortgaged my horses and property. The mortgage falls due in a few days. I trusted to my horse, Momus, to pull me through and set me on my legs again. I was not clever enough, and I've fallen in badly."

"And have you no friends who——"

"Friends! Yes, any number when things are good; while I'm leading in winners, or able to put them on to a good thing; but, when the luck is out, none at all. Since I left the course to-day in disgrace, not one of those who have eagerly sought my acquaintance, and chased me for information, has been to see me."

"And if a friend was to offer assistance, you would not refuse?" asked Wakeman.

"For my daughter's sake, I could not."

"Well, let me be that friend. I have money; I am rich, in fact; for, apart from my salary, I have another

source of income. I will pay off this mortgage, and have it transferred to my own name. I will use my influence—for though, having nothing to do with racing now, I know many prominent men connected with the leading body—and can find money, if necessary, to have this Momus business inquired into thoroughly. Perhaps this man Dixon, whom you blame, may be induced to speak, or the jockey. Money is all powerful, and——”

Fenton had risen to his feet, and a faint colour came back to his haggard cheeks. “Do you mean it? You will help me?” he cried.

“Yes, I will; but there is something you must do in return——”

“And that is?” said Fenton, eagerly.

“It concerns your daughter. I love her. I want her. I offer her wealth, position, happiness. She prefers poverty with my clerk, Curtis. Get her to give this fellow up; induce her to marry me. Then I will help you.”

“You wish me to sell you my girl!” cried Fenton. “To destroy her happiness, so that I may not lose my home and horses! You make a big mistake, Mr. Wakeman.”

“You refuse my offer?”

“I do! Rather would I remain down for ever than rise again at the price of my daughter’s happiness!”

Roger Fenton sank wearily into his chair again. Wakeman regarded him for a moment, his face twitching with anger; then he turned without speaking, and left the house.

CHAPTER III.

KIDNAPPED.

HORACE WAKEMAN was secretary to the manufacturing firm of Hardgoods, Hopkins, and Co., Ltd., and also held shares in the company. He had been in the firm's employ for some years, and had worked his way up to a position of trust by sheer merit. He was always considered a somewhat eccentric man, but as his ability was unquestioned, he got on. He mixed but little with his fellows, had his own way of spending his spare time, and often changed his mode of recreation. People called his ideas fads, but his intimates knew him to be smart, shrewd, thrifty, "always on the make." At one time theatricals interested him largely. He studied and became perfect in the art of making up, until he could assume disguises that defied his closest acquaintances to penetrate. Then he appeared to tire of the actor fad, and developed a passion for horse-racing. As a backer of horses he was not a great success, and was often heard to say that the only way to make money at the game was to become a bookmaker. At length the racecourse and he parted company. He found religion. The firm, being also religious, further promotion followed, and he assumed the secretaryship.

Kendall Curtis was also employed in the office of Hardgoods, Hopkins, Ltd. Between him and Wake-

man there existed a mutual dislike. Wakeman hated Curtis because he had won the love of Vera Fenton. Curtis disliked the other because he considered him a hypocrite. He was not jealous, however, and raised no objection to Vera attending the church meetings, where she met Wakeman, but he took good care to always be on hand to escort her home.

Curtis was young, strong, and handsome, and excelled in all manly games. He and Vera had been "mates" from their schooldays. He had been her hero always, and when at last he told his tale of love, and asked her to become his wife, her happiness was complete. Ken had not been altogether of a saving disposition, so it was necessary to wait a bit until he was able to furnish a home for his pretty sweetheart.

Such was the position when the disaster of Epsom Day caused them to decide to wait no longer.

A fortnight had gone by since that unlucky day. Roger Fenton still remained in his old home in a state of uncertainty. The mortgage had fallen due, but as yet Dixon had made no sign. Once only had he visited Fenton since the downfall of Momus. There had been bitter reproaches from the disgraced trainer, and threats from the bookmaker. The threats had not been carried out. Dixon had left the city, and had not yet returned. He had not disclosed his location, but, that being Dixon's custom, it caused no comment.

Horace Wakeman had again made his peace with Vera, and, apologising for his recent declaration, had wished her and Curtis joy. He even asked Ken to accept him as his groomsman at the wedding, and Curtis consented with a cordiality he did not feel.

That they still remained undisturbed in the cottage, Vera declared was due to Wakeman. He had inter-

vened with Dixon, and was going to be their good friend after all.

So she told her father, and Ken did not try to shake her belief, though he did not rely much on Wakeman's goodness or friendship either.

The all-important day soon arrived. Ken had asked a week's leave, but, owing to a rush of business, was refused; so Friday had been chosen, thus allowing a brief week-end honeymoon. Curtis was to continue his work until two o'clock, when he would be free till Monday morning.

During the morning the warehouse employees trooped downstairs in a body. Horace Wakeman emerged from his sanctum, and met them. Kendall Curtis was called forward.

As he stood surrounded by his fellow-workers, Wakeman made a speech of praise and congratulation. Then he handed Ken a cheque for fifty pounds. A wedding present from his work-mates and the firm.

"May God grant that your union may be blessed with the greatest of happiness," said Wakeman in conclusion.

Ken took the cheque, not without thinking that there was a false ring in Horace Wakeman's benediction, and briefly spoke his thanks. Then there were cheers for Ken Curtis, much shaking of his hand, and things assumed their normal condition.

It was pay day with the firm, and part of Ken's duty was to cash the wages cheque. The amount was rather large, as many hands were employed in warehouse and factory by Hardgoods, Hopkins, and Co. After lunch he sallied forth, handbag in hand, and with his own cheque and the wages cheque in his pocket, proceeded to the bank. He had not much time to spare. He

had to get through his work, go home to change, and be at the church at four o'clock. He was annoyed that he had not been granted leave of absence, and put it down to petty spite on Wakeman's part. That gentleman, Ken felt sure, despite his many expressions of goodwill, was in reality at heart an angry and disappointed man. Wakeman had not returned to his office after lunch, having, it was supposed, gone to array himself for the coming ceremony, at which he was to officiate as best man—another thing that grated on Ken's nerves. Try as he would, he could not think well of Horace Wakeman. He felt grateful for the handsome wedding present he had received that day. The form it had taken was very acceptable, indeed, and he resolved to do all he could to retain the goodwill of his employers and his fellow-workers.

The previous night he had received another present. It was from his future father-in-law, Roger Fenton. The unfortunate trainer had little of the world's goods to bestow, there being only one thing left that he could really call his own—a horse, and that he gave to Curtis.

A few years back a Caulfield trainer, while on a visit to Randwick, had stayed with Fenton, and while there had taken a fancy to an ancient Sunrise mare of Fenton's. Roger told him to take her, which he did on the understanding that Fenton was to own the first foal she threw. She was mated with Zalinski. The result was a fine colt, now rising three years old. Fenton had not taken any steps to have the youngster trained, but had intended to do so after Momus won the Epsom. Now that that idea could not be carried out, he had had documents properly drawn up transferring this unnamed colt by Zalinski from Aurora to Kendall Curtis.

Having placed the transfer in Curtis's hand, he felt

that in giving him his daughter and his horse, he had done all that mortal man could do. Ken fully appreciated the sacrifice.

Curtis soon reached the bank, and presented his cheques, which the teller proceeded to cash in gold and silver.

While he was thus engaged an old lady entered the bank. She was a very feeble dame, bent with age, using a stick to support her tottering limbs. Pausing, she looked about her with an expression of annoyance. An official hastened to ask if he could be of any assistance to her. "Stupid!" she muttered querulously, "I wanted the Commercial; I have come to the wrong bank. Never mind, thank you; I'll rest here for a moment." She sank into a seat. Then her gaze rested on Kendall Curtis. She watched him intently. When all the money was transferred to the bag, he moved towards the door. As he neared it the old woman rose and made as if to pass out, but fumbled awkwardly with the handle of the swinging door. "Allow me," said Curtis, pulling it open, and pausing to let her go through. She did so; then, stumbling, fell down the few steps leading to the main entrance. Curtis hastened to her, and lifted her to her feet. Restoring her stick to her trembling hand, he asked, "Are you hurt?"

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" she moaned; "Oh, my back! I did not think of the steps. Please, help me to my cab."

Outside a four-wheeled cab was waiting. The driver sprang down when he saw Ken and the old lady.

"What's up?" he asked. "Has she been took bad?"

"The lady has had a fall. She ought to be taken home at once," answered Curtis.

Grumbling that "She was a bloomin' pest, and ought to have a keeper," the man opened the door of the vehicle.

"We'll have a job to get her in," he remarked. "If you get in first and get hold of her, I'll give her a shove from behind."

Without hesitating, Curtis sprang into the cab. Placing his bag upon the seat, he stretched forth his hand to grasp that of the woman.

He pulled gently, but she came in so suddenly—as if she had sprung or been thrown upon him—that he staggered back, and fell with the woman on top of him. The door was closed with a bang. At once the cab began to move quickly. Surprised and startled, Ken sought to push the woman away, that he might rise. Surprise gave way to alarm when he found he was being held in a grasp anything but feeble. He struggled to free himself, but his strange assailant had the advantage. One hand grasped his throat, while with the other something soft was being forced against his mouth and nose. A strange pungent odour ascended his nostrils. A feeling of helplessness began to overcome him. His struggles became weaker and weaker, until at last darkness came, and he knew no more.

CHAPTER IV.

A MISSING BRIDEGROOM.

THE little church at Waverley in which Vera Fenton had elected to be joined in matrimony with Kendall Curtis, was well filled with members of the fair sex long before the hour fixed for the wedding. Though it was to be a very quiet affair, the news had spread that the trainer's pretty daughter was to be married on that day, and maidens, young and otherwise, and matrons also had flocked to the church to witness the ceremony that never appears to lose its interest for a woman.

A little while before four o'clock Horace Wakeman, resplendent in silk hat and garments suitable to the occasion, arrived. He lingered outside the church, waiting for the bridegroom, but it was the bride and her party who arrived first. Vera and her father in one cab, her two youthful bridesmaids in another. Wakeman assisted the bride from the cab. A frown of annoyance clouded her face as she remarked the absence of Ken.

"He will be here presently, I'm sure," murmured Wakeman. "Detained at the office most probably."

Vera passed up the aisle on the arm of her father, Wakeman and the bridesmaids following.

There was a buzz of whispered conversation as the

members of the party seated themselves in a front pew to await the coming of the bridegroom.

The minutes went slowly by. Still Curtis did not arrive. Uneasiness was depicted on every countenance. Vera was as pale as death. The whispers of the congregation increased, the clergyman began to exhibit signs of impatience.

"Oh, this is unbearable!" exclaimed Vera. "What ever can be the matter? I——"

"Hush! be calm," whispered Wakeman. "He will come presently."

He looked at his watch; it was half-past four. "I will go and make inquiries through the telephone," he whispered to Vera. "Be brave. I shall not be long."

He slipped from the seat, and out of the church. The suspense became greater during his absence. Vera, all the colour gone from her face, sat biting her lips in an agony of shame and anxiety. Her father, at a loss to know what to do, patted and stroked her arm as he would soothe a restless, high-strung filly.

At last Wakeman reappeared. He was in the vestry with the clergyman, and was beckoning to Vera. She sprang to her feet; then, with wildly beating heart, hastened to him, glad at least to escape the eyes of the many women present. Roger Fenton followed his girl, wonderingly. Whispers grew louder, and necks were stretched in an endeavour to see what was happening in the vestry.

The missing one had not arrived, and that there was bad news for her Vera read on the face of the kindly minister.

"What is the matter? Tell me at once," demanded Vera.

Wakeman, taking her arm, led her gently out into a little garden at the side of the church.

"What has happened to Ken?" Has he met with an accident? Why don't you tell me?" she cried, impatiently.

"You must prepare for a shock, Vera," said Wakeman softly. "Curtis will not be here——"

"Why? Is he ill, or——"

"Be calm, please; I will tell you all, my poor girl," continued Wakeman, pityingly. "You have been basely deceived; Curtis is a scoundrel—a——"

"It's a cruel lie!" burst out Vera. "He is no——"

"Hear me out, I beg. I say he has shamefully deceived you. Why he has dragged you here to be humiliated publicly I cannot conceive. It is the height of cruelty. To-day this unworthy man on whom you have bestowed your love received a sum of fifty pounds, a present for you both. With a cheque for that amount, together with another for nearly £500, he went to the bank. He has not yet returned with the money."

"He is no thief!" gasped Vera. "You do not mean——"

"Let me finish, please. This much I gathered through the 'phone. He was seen to leave the bank and enter a cab with a woman. A warrant has been issued, and—— Miss Fenton—Vera, be brave; do not give way. Let me support you."

Vera had staggered, almost fallen; but with an effort she mastered herself.

"It is a lie!" she cried. "Kendall Curtis would not rob anyone. Ah! here he is at last. See——"

A cab dashed up to the church. A man jumped from it. The agitated girl sprang forward eagerly, only to shrink back with a moan of pain.

"Detective Duff," said Wakeman. "He will, perhaps, convince you."

"Mr. Wakeman!" exclaimed the man, coming towards them. "Any word from the missing bridegroom?"

"No," replied Wakeman. "We are still waiting."

"It is not true! Tell me what they say is false!" pleaded Vera. "Kendall Curtis is not a——"

"I'm afraid he is, Miss, and more," said Duff; "but I must be off. We'll get him all right, never fear, and the woman also."

"Oh! take me away! Let me hide myself!" moaned Vera. "Oh, the shame of it!"

"What need of you to hide yourself? You have done no wrong," said Wakeman, softly.

"I would welcome death, only that I must live for vengeance. I must be revenged for the shame of to-day, and then——"

"Revenge is within your grasp, now—this minute, Vera. Let this worthless trifler see that you care not for his treachery. Show him that you can be happy—aye, and rich, in spite of his faithlessness. Seize the opportunity, and when he is run to earth with the companion for whom he has cast you off, you can gloat over their misery, and be amply revenged."

"What—what do you mean?" gasped the girl.

"Mean!" he said, seizing her hands and gazing into her tearless eyes with an almost terrifying gaze that seemed to fascinate and overpower her. "I love you, girl—madly, devotedly. Let me take the place of this false lover. I will be to you a husband such as he could never have been. I will lavish such love, such luxury upon you that your life will be one dream of happiness. I will secure your father's home for him, and have his

good name restored. Vera! my love, say yes! Face your trouble bravely. Come, let the ceremony proceed. Say yes!"

As one in a dream, the girl replied:

"As you will. I am ready."

Leaning on his arm, and with eyes fixed as if she saw nothing, they re-entered the church. Wakeman spoke a few hurried words to the clergyman, who appeared rather shocked, but made no comment.

"Very well, let it be as you say," he said.

In a moment Wakeman led Vera to the altar rails. A long-drawn sigh went up from the still waiting audience. They were not going to be cheated out of a ceremony after all. Then the whispering broke out with renewed vigour when it was seen that the supposed best man seemed to have taken the bridegroom's place.

The solemn tones of the minister's voice arose above the buzz. He was reading the marriage service, and the whisperers became silent.

When it was asked, "Therefore, if any man can show just cause why they may not be joined together," no protesting voice was upraised to stay the strange proceedings.

Roger Fenton, the one man present who had a right to object to his daughter thus becoming Wakeman's wife, stood mute. He could not grasp the meaning of it all.

To the question, "Wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded husband?" she answered in the expressionless voice of a dreamer, "I will;" and when she was asked to repeat the words, "I, Vera Fenton, take thee, Horace Wakeman, to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold——" she did so in the same unemotional way.

Wakeman had slipped a plain gold ring from his little finger, and at the words "With this ring I thee wed," he grasped her cold hand and slipped the ring upon her finger.

Suddenly she seemed to awake to her surroundings. She snatched her hand away, and gazed about her as if in horror.

"No ! no !" she cried. "Not you ! You are not to be my husband ! I will not marry you !"

"Hush, dear ; all is well," whispered Wakeman again, striving to take her hand. But she shrank away, crying :

"It is not ! What farce is this ? I will not marry you !"

Tearing the ring from her finger, she dashed it to the floor.

"I will not ! I will not !" she repeated.

Wakeman seized her in his arms. "Too late !" he hissed. "You are my wife !"

Then, with a cry of despair, she sank back unconscious.

CHAPTER V.

A JOURNEY SOUTH.

THE Murrubee, outward bound for Melbourne, was ploughing her way between the Heads against a strong nor'-easter. Very few passengers were on board, the Murrubee not being much favoured by the travelling public. Most of those travelling were on deck braving the wind and drenching spray in their desire for a parting glimpse of the port they were leaving.

As the forbidding cliffs of the Heads were becoming dim in the fast-gathering dusk, and the rays from the South Head light shone forth o'er the waves, a man staggered from the steerage quarters, and gazed wonderingly about him. He was pale and wild-looking, hatless, and with dishevelled hair and disordered clothing. He passed a hand across his eyes, as if to be sure that he saw aright. He opened his mouth to cry out, but a violent nausea took possession of him. He lurched to the side of the steamer, and for a time the throes of sea-sickness deprived him of the power to think. At length he raised his head, and with blood-shot eyes gazed into the night.

"Better?" said a voice at his side. "I ain't surprised at yer bein' crook, seein' 'ow yer come aboard."

The speaker was a short, clean-shaven, sharp-looking man, of middle age, and he was smiling as if he saw something humorous in the other's suffering.

"How ? Where am I ? When and how did I get here ?" questioned the sick man, eagerly.

"A bloke brought yer aboard just as we was gettin' away. You was full as er tick, an' kickin' up a 'ell of er row. Seemed as y'd bin 'avin' er bosker bust up. The bloke slings yer inter er bunk an' leaves yer, and yer dead t' th' world in er jiff."

Again the young man pressed a hand to his aching head, and tried to understand what had happened to him.

"Y'd better get some brandy an' get back ter bunk," said his companion, and he helped the other to the bar, where a glass of spirits allayed for the time the awful feeling of sickness. Then he assisted him to reach and clamber into his cramped, uncomfortable bunk.

Gradually the memory of recent events returned to him. He remembered going to the bank and getting a large sum of money; then he helped an old woman into a cab; and then—what happened then ? For a little while his mind refused to answer, but suddenly a picture of an ugly, evil face, grinning hideously into his, appeared to him. Of a body bearing him down, while a strong, sinewy hand was choking him. Whose face was it—seared with lines and wrinkles ? the large mouth, with its even, white teeth, and the eyes so bright and piercing. Surely he had known a face like it previously. Then he remembered waking as from a long sleep on a dirty couch in a dingy room. A man was bending over him. He asked questions, but the man did not answer.

"You have been ill; drink this," the man said, proffering a glass; and, being thirsty, he drank. Some fiery spirit that seemed to burn like living coals, setting his brain in a whirl, and causing the room and its contents to move around him.

From that time all was blank. How he, Kendall Curtis, came to be here, on board a steamer well out at sea, was a question that remained unanswered.

And it was his wedding night, too. He was to have been at the church at four o'clock. He pictured the scene there. The distress, the shame and humiliation of his loved one at his seeming desertion of her. He would be branded as a scoundrel. His conduct would arouse the just indignation and anger of both Vera's friends and his own. It was awful to contemplate. Surely some enemy had plotted to bring about his downfall. He had prided himself that he had no enemies. He had done no man harm. Who then could so hate him? Stay! There was one who might cherish a grievance against him. One who had failed to win a prize—the love of a woman—through him. Yes, Horace Wakeman might hate him, because Vera loved him; but would he go to such a length to be avenged. Again the face of that old woman, looking into his, with eyes burning with hate, and mouth distorted with a hideous grin, appeared to him. Could it be the face of Horace Wakeman? The more he let his mind dwell on it, the more convinced he became that he was right. Wakeman was his enemy. Wakeman had planned and carried out this outrage on him. But what would it profit the man? Vera would never be his; her love was not for him. "She is mine alone, and she will never alter," he murmured. "In spite of all, she will believe in me, and wait my coming."

Then he fell to forming schemes of vengeance. He would return and confront this villain, and see that justice was done. He would—— But then the thought of the money came for the first time. What became of it? He searched his pockets to see if any had remained with him. One sovereign formed the total of his possessions. The wages cheque, his wedding gift! What of them? Gone! And, among other things, he was, no doubt, branded as a thief.

Lying on the hard, unyielding bunk, his mind distracted with painful thoughts, and body tortured with sea-sickness, Ken passed a wretched night. The morning brought no comfort. Eat he could not, and to leave his bunk he had no inclination. His kindly disposed fellow-passenger tried to comfort him, brought him something to drink, and talked so much that Ken had to ask him to cease.

The old boat, noted for her lack of speed, made poor progress during the day, and at night ran into a fierce southerly gale that defied her efforts to advance. For many hours she lay hove-to, but at last winds and sea became calmer. It was in the small hours of Monday morning that the Murrubee entered Port Philip. Day was breaking ere she finished the journey up the river and made fast to the wharf.

Ken appeared on deck with pale, haggard face, and creased clothing, a three days' stubble on his chin, and a shabby old hat that a fellow-passenger had supplied him with intensifying his woe-begone appearance. His legs felt as if they did not belong to him as he stepped on to the wharf and walked away with uncertain steps. There were but few people about; but Ken kept his hat pulled well down over his eyes. Every moment he expected a hand to be laid on his shoulder, and to find

himself in the grasp of the law. He was ravenously hungry now, after his long fast. In his anxiety to locate a restaurant he quite forgot his friend of the Murrubee. That worthy, however, caught up very soon.

"Your a bute," he said, "leavin' er cobber like that. Where to now?"

"Anywhere that I can get a meal," answered Ken. "I'm so hungry that I forgot to thank you for your kindness."

"That's all right, mate. Not er word. I ain't done nothing out th' way. Any'ow, if I don't bump y'r again, good luck, lad. Yer seem er bit down on it, but buck up; never say die; an' if yer think Jerry Gleeson 'd be any use ter yer, call round at this 'ere address, an' I'll see yer don't go short of er bit er tucker. I'm on'y er battler meself—up t'-day an' down t'-morrow; but I'll always do er cobber what's stiff er good turn if I can. So long, mate, fer th' present. I don't know yer name, but it don't signify."

Ken took the proffered hand.

"Good-bye, and thank you," he said. He crushed the piece of paper Jerry Gleeson had given him in his hand, and placed it carelessly in his pocket.

"I'll not want it," he thought. "I'll keep it, and write to him when I get back home. He is a good sort, if he does live on the game."

The painted window of a dining-room, with its familiar legend, ALL MEALS 6D., loomed up before him, and he entered the open door. Soon he was doing justice to the food placed before him by a sleepy-looking waitress. He felt better now; his mind was more at ease; for he had resolved to return to Sydney, and boldly face his persecutors. He was no thief or

betrayed woman. Why should he be afraid? His word was as good as Wakeman's. He would wire his whereabouts to the firm, asking for money to bring him back. He must have justice for the outrage he had been subjected to. While he thus settled things in his mind the morning paper was laid at his elbow. He paused in his eating to open it. No doubt something about himself would be therein. Yes; here it was—a brief telegraphic account, preceded by many headlines:—

SYDNEY SENSATION!

A CLERK DISAPPEARS ON HIS WEDDING DAY!

£500 ALSO MISSING!

A DECEIVED BRIDE CONSOLES HERSELF WITH BEST MAN.

"God! What did that last headline mean?"

His heart beat rapidly as he read through the paragraph.

"Kendall Curtis, head clerk to a well-known city firm, suddenly disappeared on Friday afternoon. He was to have been married on that day. He left the office early to cash a cheque for nearly £500, and has not been heard from since. The wedding party waited long at the church, but no bridegroom came. At last the wronged lady astonished the onlookers by bestowing her hand on the best man, Horace Wakeman, a formerly rejected lover, and they were married. It is understood that the police have a clue to the missing man's whereabouts. They believe that he left Sydney by the afternoon train for Newcastle, in company with a female, and hope to make an arrest very soon."

The paper fell from Ken's nerveless grasp. He was stupefied and horror-stricken at what he had read.

Vera lost to him ! Wakeman's wife ! It was awful.

All desire to complete his meal left him. Rising, he mechanically paid the girl, and went out into the street.

This, then, was the end of his dream of future happiness. Wakeman had beaten him badly ; branded him as a criminal, and stolen his bride. But what of Vera ? How could she do it ? How could she be so callous, so false to him, as to throw herself into the arms of Wakeman ? He could not understand it. Could it be that she loved Wakeman all the time ? Ah, well ! it was done now, and he would not intrude on her happiness. Why should he return ? Vera had deserted him, and nothing else mattered. Let them find and drag him back if they could ; otherwise Sydney would know him no more. Some day he and Horace Wakeman would meet, and then a heavy score would require settling between them.

Thus communing with himself, he wandered into the heart of marvellous Melbourne, a city quite unknown to him. Whither his footsteps would lead him he had no idea.

CHAPTER VI.

MURDER.

HORACE WAKEMAN sat in his room, thinking deeply. He looked ill and worried, as, indeed, he was. The Curtis affair, for one thing, was causing him much annoyance. The police had failed to trace the defaulter, and the heads of the firm kept bothering him about it. They were determined to bring Curtis to justice, and looked to Wakeman to leave no stone unturned to accomplish that end.

The cab in which Curtis was said to have left the bank, had been found deserted not far from the railway station. No trace of the driver or the old woman had been discovered, but a man had come forward who stated that he had seen Kendall Curtis hurrying through the crowd on the station as if eager to catch a train on the afternoon of his disappearance. Horace Wakeman, too, had mentioned—and the statement was supported by others in the office—that on more than one occasion he had heard Curtis declare that if he ever had to leave the country for any reason, he would make for Newcastle, and take a ship for South America.

So the police turned their attention to Newcastle. Every likely hiding-place was searched; each outgoing ship closely watched; but with no result. To-day Wakeman had declared that the police were fools;

that while they were watching the wharves so closely, no doubt the fugitive had taken train and gone farther north, to Queensland, and got clear away. So special attention was directed to that quarter, and Wakeman smiled grimly to himself. He did not want Kendall Curtis to return at present. In fact, he was afraid the missing one might come back unbidden, a thing he hoped would not occur.

Though this Curtis business was an hourly source of worry to him while at his office, it was as nothing compared to the pain and mortification he felt at his failure to gain access to the woman who he considered was legally his wife.

Since that afternoon, now more than a week ago, when he had stood beside Vera Fenton at the altar rails, he had not seen her. When she fainted at the close of the ceremony, her father, suddenly galvanised into activity at the sight of his daughter's distress, seized her in his arms, and, despite Horace Wakeman's protests, carried her from the church. Once in the open air she had partially recovered. Wakeman tried to take her from her father's care, but the old man angrily repulsed him.

"But she is my wife now!" protested Wakeman.

"She is not," replied Fenton. "She has not put her name to anything. You've got no claim on her."

Wakeman smiled. "That does not signify, Mr. Fenton," he said. "I——"

"She's not your wife, and don't intend to be; so clear out!" cried Roger Fenton. "What possessed her to say she would be I don't know; but you don't get her anyhow."

Lifting the half-conscious girl into a cab, he sprang in after her, and, shouting "Home!" to the driver, the

vehicle dashed away, leaving Wakeman standing, flushed and angry, surrounded by a curious crowd.

He made no attempt to follow, but, forcing his way through the people, he entered another cab and drove citywards.

"I will see them to-night," he muttered. "Perhaps they will be more reasonable then."

He went out to Fenton's at night, but the old man shut the door in his face, and refused him admission. Each day during the week he had failed in his attempts to see Vera to claim her as his wife.

So that night he sat in his room, brooding over his troubles, and trying to formulate a plan to gain at least an interview with Vera.

"I will stand it no longer !" he muttered. "I will try once more to-night by gentle means to see her. If I fail, another way will quickly land them in the street; then, homeless and friendless, they will be glad to turn to me for help."

Rising, he placed his Bible in his pocket, and left the house. He was to speak in the street to-night, to beg for help for the poor helpless cripples of the city, who could not help themselves. He had done much for these afflicted ones of late, both by money and speech, and by them, at least, the name of this man was blessed.

On the afternoon of this same Saturday another man, old and grey, sat in the verandah of his home, "chewing the cud of bitter reflection." This was Roger Fenton, to whom the world seemed to have lost its gladness. Whilst musing there alone, the sound of footsteps caused him to raise his head. He was surprised to see standing before him Doods Dixon.

"Back again, Fenton," said the bookmaker, with an ugly smile that disclosed the gap where two teeth were missing.

"So I see," returned Roger; "and I'm not overjoyed at it."

"Wish I'd never come back, eh? Ah, well, we can't get everything we want. I've 'ad a bit of a spell, an' now I'm ready for business again."

"Well, let me know your business," said Roger. "When do you want us to clear out? When have I to leave the house I've lived in for twenty years, where my child was born, where my wife breathed her last, and——"

"'Ang it! don't get sentimental, Roger," interrupted Dixon. "I was thinkin' of takin' over th' property, right away, as you don't seem to be goin' ter pay up; but there's a friend of yours wants ter buy me out, an' give yer back yer 'ome an' 'orses."

"A friend of mine!"

"Yes; relation, in fact; bloke what married yer daughter."

"Horace Wakeman!" cried Fenton.

"That's right; an' a decent sort, too. He's all broke up over yer turnin' against him. Why, th' girl ought to rush 'im. Whips of brass, good position an'——"

"My daughter doesn't want him; and if you're come to plead his cause, you might as well go again, for I will never ask my girl to marry a man she does not love."

"But she is married to 'im!" cried Dixon. "He can force——"

"Now, that'll do," interrupted the trainer. "I had no idea that the sanctimonious Horace Wakeman would choose Doods Dixon, the gambler, as his envoy."

"Nothin' like that, Fenton; on'y I feel sorry fer th' feller. He's bin ter see me, an' told me 'is trouble, an' wants ter do th' 'andsome. 'E'll give me a good price fer th' place, an' make it all over ter you again if yer let 'im 'ave th' girl. Now, ain't that a fair offer. It's nothin' ter do with me; but I reckon yer a chump if yer don't meet 'im."

"He will never get Vera unless it is her own wish," said Fenton. "And as for buying the place, that's between yourselves. It matters little to me, now that I've lost it, who owns it."

"Don't be foolish, man. Let me carry back a message of hope to Wakeman. Tell me where Vera is that he might see her."

He spoke eagerly, and his mode of speech had altered, but Roger Fenton did not notice the change.

"It's no good, Dixon," he said. "I will not allow the girl to be worried. She is ill. I have had her brought home, so that——"

"She is here, then! Ah!——"

"Umph! You've got that much out of me to carry to your new friend, Wakeman," said Fenton, angrily. "Never mind; if he comes here, I'll be ready for him. Now you can go, and be d——d to you, and Horace Wakeman, too. *You* have robbed me of all I had in the world, and *he* would rob me of my child. But, though he is in league with such a scoundrel as you, Doods Dixon, I defy him!"

The old man stepped through the open door, and closed it sharply in the face of Dixon, who sought to follow him. He watched the bookmaker walk down the little garden path and out through the gate. Then he sank into a chair and bowed his head in his hands.

"It's hard to leave the old place," he moaned; "but it must be faced soon now—very soon."

A figure glided into the room—a girl, pale and hollow-cheeked. She knelt by the old man's knees, and placed an arm around his neck.

"Dad !—Dad !" she murmured. "What is it ? Who was that man whose voice I heard just now ? I was dozing when I heard it. It frightened me. It sounded like his voice. I thought he had come for me to drag me away. Tell me, was it my—was it Horace Wakeman ?"

"No, child, not he, but the scoundrel who has ruined me, Doods Dixon. The man who professed to be my friend, whose help I accepted in good faith, but who, when he had me in his dirty grip, squeezed the very life's blood out of me. Doods Dixon, the Silver King, liar and thief !"

The old man had risen, and his voice was raised in anger.

"Hush, Dad !" said Vera, gently forcing him into his chair again. "You mustn't excite yourself so. Tell me, what did he want ? Must we leave the old place ?"

"He has been approached by Horace Wakeman, and says that Wakeman will buy the property from him, and make it over to me, provided that you accept him as your husband."

"Oh ! And you told him——"

"That, sooner than my little girl should wed a man she does not love, I would go out and face starvation cheerfully."

"Dear old Dad !" murmured Vera. "But you must not. It will break your heart to leave this dear home,

where we have been so happy. I will do this thing. I will go to——”

“Vera ! You do not know what you say. You do not love this man ; you——”

“No, no ! I hate him. How I allowed myself to fall under his influence at the church I do not know. The shame of that evil day will haunt me for ever. But, Dad, I must not be so selfish. I must think of you—of your lost home——”

“Enough, girl ! My home shall never be saved at the price of your happiness. His money will bring you no peace of mind, and some day Kendall Curtis may return, and then——”

“Oh ! it would be awful ! Ken will come back. There has been some trickery practised to separate us. I'll never believe that he is a thief.”

“Nor I,” said Fenton. “If he lives, some day he will come back and clear himself.”

“I'm sure of it,” said Vera. “And, Dad, as you do not wish me to acknowledge Horace Wakeman as my husband, let us go away at once. Do not wait until we are turned out. We will face the world together. I can work. Oh ! you don't know how clever I am. I can do almost anything. We will go right away—to Melbourne. I have a few pounds of my own—enough for a little while. I will soon find something to do, Dad, and we will live for one another, till the clouds pass away, and the sun shines again. Come, Dad, what do you say ? Is it not best to leave this place at once ?”

Fenton drew his daughter to him, and kissed her. “Brave little woman !” he said. “Your dear mother lives again in you. Let me think it over, and to-morrow I will tell you what I think we had better do.”

Vera withdrew with a sigh, and her father resumed his despondent attitude.

For a long time he sat thus. A sound as of a closing door at last aroused him. He started to his feet in alarm. A man was in the room, facing him.

"You !" he gasped. "How did you get here ? The door was locked. You——"

"Love laughs at locksmiths," said the intruder. "I am here, and I want my wife !"

"Wife ! What do you mean, Mr. Wakeman ?"

"Just what I say. I will be thwarted no longer. She is here, and I demand to see her."

"My daughter is no wife of yours. She will not see you ; neither shall you force yourself upon her. I defy you !"

"Roger Fenton," said Wakeman, gently, "be reasonable. You are standing in your own light. You are a ruined man. Dixon can turn you from your home. It is in my power to save you. Just let me see Vera, and then——"

"I will not !"

"Fool !" cried Wakeman. "You would throw away your worldly goods, but what of your honour ?—your good name you prate so much about ? That, too, may be restored."

"How ? What do you mean ?"

"Listen to me, Roger Fenton. This Dixon is not all bad. I have talked much to him, and touched his heart. He has admitted to me that he caused Momus to be pulled in the Epsom. Do as I wish ; give me Vera, and a statutory declaration shall be made by Doods Dixon. Your name, your means of livelihood, will be——"

"And if I say I do not believe you ?" interrupted Fenton.

"Then I will get what I want by other means, and you can go to hell !" cried Wakeman, angrily.

Fenton opened his mouth to speak, but paused to stare at Wakeman. An alteration in the man's appearance caught his eye. A gap showed in Wakeman's mouth where formerly had been an unbroken row of teeth.

"Well ! Your answer ?" demanded Wakeman. What are you gaping at, man ? Are you——"

He glanced at himself in the sideboard mirror. A look of horror distorted his features. He became white as death. Quickly recovering, he cried :

"Be quick ! Your answer !"

"You have already had it. No ! a thousand times no !" said Fenton, looking him straight in the face. "Something has been made plain to me just in one moment—something that has often puzzled me ; but I see it all now——"

"What are you talking about ?" demanded Wakeman, gripping his walking cane tightly, and stepping closer to the old man. "What, in God's name, have you discovered ?"

"That you are a scoundrel, a man living a——"

"Be careful, Fenton," hissed the other, shaking with passion. "Do not make me angry."

"I'm not afraid of you. I will denounce you to the world for what you are. Ah ! I know you now, Mister——"

The words died on the old man's lips. Wakeman, overcome with anger, had grasped him by the throat with a grip of steel. The walking cane was uplifted and crashed down on the unprotected, grey head.

"Silence !" screamed Wakeman ; and again the cruel weapon fell. Blood trickled down the wrinkled face,



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and the murderer, relaxing his hold, the unconscious man fell, and lay helpless, with open eyes staring upward.

Again the other struck. Then his passion passed, and he saw what he had done. The stick fell from his nerveless grasp. He sank to his knees beside the body.

"By God !" he cried, "he's dead ! Fenton ! Roger ! Speak to me. I did not mean it ! By God ! I did not mean it !"

A sound of a soft footfall came to him. He looked about in an agony of fright and despair. The door opened, and a girl entered.

"Father, did you call ?" she said.

It was Vera—his wife !

She looked at him wonderingly. Then she saw that thing stretched upon the floor.

An awful scream of "Dad !" and she had flung herself on her father's body.

Wakeman, rushing from the room, fled into the night.

CHAPTER VII.

EXIT WAKEMAN.

ONCE again the names of Fenton and Wakeman were prominently before the public. The warning off of Roger Fenton in connection with the Epsom had first brought him notoriety. Then the disappearance of his daughter's lover and her sensational acceptance of Horace Wakeman as his substitute at the altar rails, gave the gossips much to talk about. And now, the morning's papers told a shocked community that Roger Fenton was dead, brutally done to death by that same Horace Wakeman, whose claim to his daughter he disputed.

But where was the murderer? The crime had been committed late on Saturday night, and discovered soon after. Still the police had made no arrest. Horace Wakeman had vanished entirely. The incompetency of the police and detective force was a subject of conversation with numbers of citizens who appeared to think that the peculiar ability of a Sherlock Holmes should be found under the helmet of every member of the force.

He had returned home after midnight on the night of the tragedy. The aged lady who was his house-keeper had heard him let himself in, and had called out to know if anything was wanted. Receiving a

reply in the negative, she had gone to sleep, and knew no more, until roused later on by the police.

"Yes, Mr. Wakeman was in his room," she told the inquiring officers; but a visit to the wanted man's apartment proved her to be wrong. He was not there.

That he had been recently was plain enough. The room was in disorder. Clothes were strewn about the floor. The suit he had been wearing lay on the bed, and a shirt with bloodstains on the cuffs was trampled under foot. Evidently the murderer had made a hurried change and hastened away. On a small table lay a letter addressed to Donald Dixon. It was opened and read :

"Our negotiations *re* Fenton's mortgage are off. Fenton is dead. My temper overcame me to-night, and I have become a criminal. I want you to do all you can for Vera—she is now lost to me for ever. See that she is provided for, that is all I ask. As for myself, I am flying from justice; but I will not be taken; of that you can rest assured. The police will not find me, alive or dead. Do what I ask, and earn the gratitude of

HORACE WAKEMAN."

That was all. No clue to his whereabouts; nothing to denote his future movements.

The police withdrew after leaving one of their number to watch the place.

During the morning a detective officer called at the residential chambers at which Dood Dixon lived when in town, and found the bookmaker reading an account of the murder over a late breakfast.

"Didn't quite expect to find you here, Mr. Dixon," said the detective, "as I know you usually spend the week end away from the city."

"That's right," answered Dixon; "an' most er th' week as well. Y' see, I 'ad a little affair up country

to attend ter; but I've fixed things up now, so that I can spend more time in town in future. So y'll see more er me now."

"Suppose you've read about the murder?" asked the officer.

"Jest readin' it. Terrible, ain't it. Fancy bashin' poor old Fenton's 'ead in! Awful! I suppose this Horace Wakeman did it all right?"

"Without a doubt. The girl saw him there, standing over the body, and he admits it in a letter to you. Here it is. That's what I called about."

"Ter me! What th' blazes 'as it got ter do with me?" exclaimed Dixon, rising and snatching the letter from the other's hand.

"Um; yes, that's right," he muttered, as he read it.

"Yer see, Mr. Duff, this bloke, Wakeman, 'as bin goin' ter do er deal with me over Fenton's property, which now belongs to me. 'E reckoned 'e wus properly married ter the daughter; but th' old man an' th' girl wouldn't take 'im on. So, ter try an' win them over 'e wus goin' to buy back th' 'ome an' 'orses fer Fenton. Seems 'e lost 'is temper, an' ended things quick an' sudden. I'll see what I can do fer the poor girl, any'ow. I can't do no more, can I?"

"No, I suppose not," said Duff. "I expect you will be wanted at the inquest to-morrow, as you know something of the motive that led up to the crime."

"I'd sooner 'ave nothin' ter do with it, but if I'm wanted I'll be there. 'Ave yer any idea where Wakeman got to?"

"None," said Duff; "no clue at all. Some say he's sure to suicide; but I've got a little theory of my own. I think he's in the city yet, alive, and——"

"Hidin, I suppose?" remarked Dixon.

"Perhaps; disguised, anyhow. I knew him pretty well, Mr. Dixon. He was one of the best amateur character actors living—better than any professional, in my opinion. I think that he has adopted some disguise, and is living under the very noses of those who are hunting for him."

"And do you think you could penetrate his disguise, did you meet him face to face?" asked Dixon, looking keenly at the detective through his glasses.

"I'm pretty good at that sort of thing, and I believe I could," answered Duff, not noticing that the book-maker's question was not spoken in the usual slipshod vernacular generally used by him.

"He would 'ave ter be a pretty cool bloke ter take on a job er that sort," said Dixon.

"And so he is, cool and clever, and we'll have a job to get him. I'm sorry for him, because he's not a bad fellow, and has done a lot of good for poor unfortunates lately."

"Yes; I believe 'e wus given to religion," sneered Dixon. "They're all th' same, them holy Joes—a no-good lot. I 'ope yer get 'im, fer if ever a man deserved ter swing, it's 'Orace Wakeman."

Detective Duff withdrew, leaving Dixon to finish his meal. He, however, seemed in no humour for eating. Pushing the food from him, and casting the paper to the floor, he rose and paced the room in agitation.

"Duplicity, hypocrisy, deceit!" he muttered. "Where will it end? Is there no escape from the torturing fever of my brain?" He paused at length in his walk, and stood, looking out of the window into the sunshine of the peaceful Sabbath morning. The church bells were ringing, and many were passing below on their way to divine worship.

Dixon smiled grimly as he stood. "One will be missed from his accustomed place this morning," he mused. "One voice less will be raised in praise of the Divine Giver of all things. Horace Wakeman—thief, murderer, and liar ! What will your God do for you now ?"

CHAPTER VIII.

PROFESSOR COONEY'S BOXING SCHOOL.

A SMALL shop stood in one of the side streets of Footscray, a suburb of Melbourne. The window, ornamented with pictures of pugilists and representations of fistic encounters culled from the *Police News*, gave a prominent place to the photos of local boxing celebrities, and a card was displayed announcing that boxing was taught on the premises by the well-known heavyweight, Chilla Cooney. The glass front of the window bore the inscription "NAT GLEESON, HAIRDRESSER AND TOBACCONIST." It was night, and raining, and the brightly-lighted shop looked enticing to a shabby, miserable-looking, wet young man, who peered through the doorway, seemingly undecided whether to enter or pass on.

At last the beating rain decided him, and he stepped within. A pale youth with black hair plastered low down on his forehead, and who was leisurely smoking a cigarette, emerged from an apartment dignified with the title of "Saloon," and asked, "What's th' trouble?"

"I'm looking for a Mr. Jerry Gleeson. Does he live here?" replied the other.

"Upstairs," said the youth. "Go right through, an' up th' stairs. Y'll find his nibs there."

Shaking some of the water from his hat and clothes, the stranger did as he was directed. As he ascended the sound of loud talking and boisterous laughter was borne to his ears, and he paused. He was in no humour to face company, and would have turned back, only that the youth was close behind him, and urged him upward.

"Up yer go ! What yer frightened of ? Nobody'll eat yer," he said.

Arrived at the top, he opened a door, and shouting, "Bloke wants Jerry," pushed the damp one into the room, and retreated.

The room was full of smoke, and for a moment little could be seen through the haze. Then the newcomer made out that about a dozen men were there. One young fellow, attired in a pair of trunks and sand shoes, was busily engaged in an encounter with a swinging punching ball. Another, in a similar state of undress, was skipping vigorously, and executing steps that would have made a professional skipping-rope dancer envious. Two more were sparring under the watchful eye of a very stout man, with closely-cropped hair, clean-shaven face, and a flattened nose. Others were playing cards and discussing fistic events, past and to take place in the near future.

"Want me ?" exclaimed one of the card-players, rising and coming towards his visitor with a puzzled look. "I don't think I know yer, Mister."

"Forgotten me already, Mr. Gleeson ?" said the other nervously.

"Why, strike me if it ain't me shipmate from Sydney !" exclaimed Gleeson. "I didn't expect yer ter turn up, although I give yer me address. Thought yer

might 'ave some toffy relations to go to; but yer looks as if yer on th' rocks. Doin' no good, eh?"

"No good at all," answered Ken. "I have no friends in Melbourne, and soon used the little cash I had. Then I sold my good clothes and bought these old things; and for two nights I've slept out on the Yarra bank. I thought you might be able to put me on to a way of earning something, so I looked in as I was passing, and——"

"Umph!" said Jerry. "Things ain't th' best just now. Yer see, this ain't my joint; it's me brother Nat's. I makes it me 'arbor of refuge, as it were, when I'm stony; an' that's how things is now. Anyway, we'll never see er bloke short uv er bit er tucker, an' er place ter doss out er th' rain. Come along with me, an' I'll see what's doin' in th' kitchen."

Ken followed Jerry down the stairs again, the kind-hearted "battler" talking all the time.

"Yer see, me brother Nat an' his missus, they're real business people, an' real hard grafters. Besides this 'ere joint, Nat's got er coffee stall; he's gettin' things ready ter go out now. Smell the meat pies an' save-loys? What oh! Don't it make yer mouth water? An' he lets th' upstairs room ter Cooney fer teachin' boxin', and er bit er gaffin' now and then, an' th' missus runs er stall in th' Markits. Oh, I tell yer, they ain't too slow; an' if they are sockin' the brass, d'yer blame 'em? Come along in; it's all right."

Curtis entered the kitchen, which was filled with savoury odours from a number of utensils on the stove, before which a young-looking woman was standing, while a man much like Jerry, only of heavier build, was busy placing the results of his wife's cooking in a large tin receptacle for transference to the "stall," which

could be seen through the window, with a horse in the shafts, ready to start for the usual stand.

"Hello, Jerry ! Who's yer friend ?" said the lady, eyeing Curtis critically.

"Cobber er mine. Give him er feed, Missus; he wants it," said Jerry.

"Right O !" cried Mrs. Gleeson, cheerfully. "He looks a bit that way, don't he, Nat ?"

"Poor as er bandicoot," remarked Nat. "Let him get some er that there soup of yours into him, Min, an' he won't feel 'ungry fer er fortnight."

"Here you are !" said Min, placing a large basin of steaming hot soup in front of Ken. "That's th' stuff fer a hempty stummick. I reckon th' boys 'll rush my old man to-night, when they get er sniff of that, eh ? It's er real winter's night, ain't it?"

"It is cold for September," said Ken, looking up. "I—er—really don't know how to thank you for your kindness. I was——"

"Oh, stow it !" said Min Gleeson. "We don't want no thanks. If we can't give er man or woman what's 'ungry er meal without makin' er song about it, we ought ter be——"

"That's right, Missus," put in Nat. "'Ere, young feller, try some saveloys an' peas; they're just th' thing. The wife 'll give yer some tea, an' there's whips er bread an' butter. Get it inter yer; yer want it all. I'll 'ave ter be makin' er start now. Any friend er Jerry's is er friend er mine. He's er bit uv er prodigle kind er bloke, but real white, let me tell yer. Good-bye, ole girl; get ter bed soon as yer can."

Nat Gleeson went forth into the night with his load of good cheer, and Ken Curtis, his craving for food appeased, rose to leave.

Jerry, who had gone from the kitchen, returned with a bundle of clothes, and Mrs. Gleeson, saying that she "must run up and see to baby," withdrew.

"Get yer wet clobber off, an' put these on," said Jerry, displaying a sweater, pants, and a pair of slippers. "An' we'll go up ter th' boys."

Curtis protested that he must be going, but Gleeson said that he would find him a shake-down for the night; so Ken said no more, but changed his clothes and proceeded upstairs again with Jerry.

There was a lull in the proceedings when they re-entered Cooney's class-room. The night's lesson was over, and the pupils were dressing. Jerry introduced Curtis to the assembly.

"Cobber o' mine from Sydney," he said. "We come over be th' same boat."

The followers of the noble art did not seem anyway moved by the announcement, and took but little notice of Ken. The fat gentleman with the deformed nose, however, who was no other than Professor Cooney himself, was not so unsociable.

"Ow are yer?" he said, smiling and nodding his head at Curtis. "Pleased ter meet anyone frum Sydney. I put in some good times there from fifteen ter twenty years ago. Ah! them wus th' days. Th' days when th' game was worth bein' in, lad. When Larry Foley 'ad th' White 'Orse, an' Jackson was in his prime; they was fighters, then, an' no mistake. God-dard an' good ole Mick Dooley, Dawson, Slavin, Murphy, Griffio—I knew 'em all, lad; an' Jimmy Burge—ironbark Jimmy; couldn't out 'im with a hax. Yes, lad, them was th' good days of th' game, an' they're gorn for ever, worse luck. We ain't got th' men fer

one thing. Why, spare me days, where could yer find th' equal of old——"

"Cut it out, Chilla; ring orf. Gor blime, oncet you get on th' flute about th' good ole days of th' game, yer dead ter talk orl night."

The interrupter was another broken-nosed, hard-featured devotee of pugilism, and his somewhat rude remark effectually silenced the reminiscent Cooney, who rose, and, with a heavy sigh, started to collect the boxing gloves and other property of the "school."

"I never see no more about th' bloke that got away with th' money over there, th' day he was ter be spliced," said one of the young men. "Blime, it was dead crook ter leave th' moll in th' lurch like that, don't yer think so?"

The remark was addressed to Curtis, but, being so unexpectedly reminded of his trouble, he could make no reply.

"Ah!" exclaimed another, disgustedly, "Molls is all the same; they ain't worth botherin' about. This 'ere donah takes on th' first bloke what offers, quick an' lively. One man was as good as another to 'er. I suppose she wus like th' rest of 'em—goes crook with one bloke an' gets another ter——"

Curtis, unable to restrain himself longer, had sprung to his feet, and, with clenched fists, faced the speaker.

"You're a dirty liar!" he cried.

Instantly every man was up and crowding round Ken and the other man, whom they called Micko Mooney.

"Hello, funny whiskers, what's up with you?" said Mooney. "Do you know th' moll?"

"No! but I object to your abuse of women generally," stammered Ken.

"Ho ! do yer ? Well, you called me a liar, an' I don't stand that from no man. Put up yer 'ands. I'm goin' ter 'ave er bit er you, yer Sydney cadger."

"'Ere, this won't do, Micko !" cried Cooney, interposing his weighty person. "I can't 'ave no rough-ups 'ere, y'know ; give th' place er bad name. Th' bloke meant no 'arm."

Jerry, too, interfered. "This cove ain't fit ter fight ; he's half-starved," he said. "Let it drop, Micko."

"Not me," said Micko. "Stand back ; I'm inter'im !"

The crowd stood back, and Ken faced his adversary, pale, but unflinching. Jerry was at his back.

"If yer c'n fight, keep yer block, an' yer got er chance ; he loses his quick. If yer can't fight, God help yer," he whispered.

For a moment the two stood facing one another : Micko in a crouching attitude, and grinning as if about to have some fun ; Curtis erect and serious. Presently Mooney executed some capers, and danced around in a style that caused laughter. Evidently he thought it was to be a comic bout. Ken took no notice of his opponent's foot work, but waited patiently. Micko made as if to spring at him ; then opened his arms and cried, "Shoo !" as if hunting away a fowl, at the same time jumping back. Quick as thought, Curtis followed up. Micko's guard was open, and Ken's left shot out, just reaching his nose, and ere the would-be funny one could recover, Ken swung the right into Micko's ribs, and brought him to his knees. Up instantly, with all the humour gone, Mooney rushed. Ken stepped quickly back, and, ducking under Micko's arm, turned smartly and just managed to get home on the jaw. Again Mooney, now thoroughly angry, rushed, only to

meet further disaster. Ken side-stepped nimbly, and planted his left right on Micko's eye. The blow lacked power, but Mooney took the floor.

"That'll do me," he growled. "I'll take yer on with th' gloves any time yer like. Who th' blazes are yer, any'ow? Yer know er bit."

"Not the mug you took me for, eh?" said Ken.

"That's right; but I'm willin' ter meet yer with th' gloves fer er purse. I'm in this game fer money. Fightin' fer love ain't no good ter me."

Micko retired crestfallen to bathe his bruised face, and Ken found that his stock had risen considerably.

"I didn't know you'd been in the game," said Jerry, admiringly. "Yer shaped like an old hand."

"Perhaps I am," said Curtis.

"I tell yer what, Jerry," said Chilla Cooney. "I'll get yer friend fixed up fer th' preliminary with Micko next Saturday night. He'll have a week ter get ready, an' there'll be a big crowd there. He'll get er few bob out of it."

Ken listened, and smiled grimly.

"That it should come to this!" he muttered.

CHAPTER IX.

A BOUT AT THE FEDERAL.

THE habitues of Cooney's boxing school had been greatly impressed with Ken's showing against Mooney in their impromptu contest. Many declared they saw in the stranger the makings of a champion, and advised him strongly to take on the game. Ken smiled at their views. He was no stranger to the "roped arena," having taken part in and won many an amateur tournament, and proved himself an uncommonly clever boxer. His tastes did not lie in the way of professional pugilism, and, at first, he was greatly against a public appearance.

"If Mooney wanted satisfaction, he could have an opportunity privately at any time," he said.

That did not suit Gleeson and Cooney, nor Mooney either. They looked at it from a money standpoint. The former thought they had discovered a prodigy that might prove remunerative if handled properly. Mooney also scented a "few quid" hanging to a meeting with "this coot," who, he was sure, he could "out" in half a round.

Jerry argued the matter out with Ken.

he jaw.

only to

"Yer dead broke," he said. "'Ere's er chance ter get er bit uv er start. Meet Micko in th' prelim' at th' Federal on Saturday night. If yer win, it'll be worth er fiver; if yer put up er good go an' lose, there'll be a good shower; an' if it's on'y er couple er sovs. it's a start, ain't it? An' if yer make er good showing, there'll be no trouble in gettin' er purse offered fer a meetin' with some one er cut above Micko. Take it on, lad; don't be er chump; an' me an' Nat'll stick to yer."

Ken, quite friendless and utterly in the hands of his new acquaintances, on whom he was at present dependent for food and shelter, at length consented to Jerry's importunities.

Cooney, who was interested in the Federal Athletic Hall, had the match arranged forthwith. Curtis was not greatly afraid of being recognised in the mode of life he was now living. He considered that Harry Hescott, the clean-shaved and short-haired young man, attired in sweater, cap, and clothes of "sporting" cut, affecting the company of pugilists, and frequenting Chilla Cooney's boxing school, would not easily be identified with Kendall Curtis, the heavy moustached, wavy-haired, fashionably-attired head clerk, wanted for embezzlement. And, though there was a remote possibility of some one being in the audience who might have seen him box in Sydney and remember him, he did not allow that to deter him, now that he had given his word to appear.

He had been greatly shocked on hearing of the murder of Roger Fenton by Horace Wakeman. His first impulse was to get to Sydney by some means to help Vera in her trouble. Second thought showed him the utter futility of such an act. He could do nothing; he

would be arrested and imprisoned on arrival. Besides, Vera was lost to him. This murderer was her husband. No; he would cross her path no more. He would put all thoughts of returning from his mind. Let him but get together a few pounds, and he would shake the dust of Australia from his feet, and work out his destiny in another land.

Having thus decided, he threw himself diligently into the work of training for his meeting with the pride of Footscray.

The time was short, but Ken was always in good fettle when at home, and his rough living of late had not greatly affected him physically. He felt that, if his mind could be kept at ease, all would be well. So he daily punched the ball, Cooney, or anything that liked to face him; skipped, ran, and worked hard, so that on Saturday night he would not be found wanting.

At night he went out and acted as assistant to Nat Gleeson in his coffee stall, thus giving something in return for his keep. And, after his years of life as a city clerk, moving always in the same groove, he found the life decidedly novel.

The days went quickly by, and the night selected for the encounter soon arrived.

'Twas Saturday night in marvellous Melbourne. The streets were thronged with an ever-moving mass of well-dressed, happy-looking men and women, youths, and maidens. The week's worries over, all were intent on having some little pleasure ere facing their various occupations again on Monday morning. For the people who crowd the streets on Saturday night are the workers of the city, who have no time to spare for sight-seeing during the week.

Some are bound for the theatres and music halls, but the majority are just out to promenade the brightly-lighted streets, seeming to see—

"Magic sights in the yellow glare,
Breathing delights in the gas-lit air,
Careless of sorrow, of grief or pain,
Two by two again and again."

Outside a one-time playhouse a crowd had assembled. It consisted solely of the sterner sex, and the clean-shaved, closely-cropped, soft-felt-hatted type of young man was much in evidence.

On the steps leading to the entrance a straw-hatted crier waxed enthusiastic about something that was to take place within.

"'Urry up, gents, an' git yer tickets ter see this fight. Sailor Sheppard an' Martin Quigley. Two er th' best. Twenty rounds; must be er decision. Come on, sports, this way fer tickets. Three, two, an' er bob. 'Urry up, an' ketch th' perlimery; just commencin'. Micko Mooney, th' pride uv Footscray, *versis* The Unknown. Don't miss it. Er bonser go, gents. This way fer tickets."

The house was packed. Many prominent citizens, racing men, business men, and some legislators, occupied seats at the ring side. The stalls and gallery were crowded with the usual followers of the noble art. Proceedings were to commence with a ten-round "go" between Micko Mooney and a stranger from Sydney. The latter had given his name as Harry Hescott, but the management preferred to announce him mysteriously as "The Unknown."

Soon the combatants ducked under the ropes and entered the ring with their seconds.

Jerry Gleeson and another were "behind" the Unknown, who was none other than Kendall Curtis, transformed for the nonce into a pugilist.

Now the critical moment was at hand. 'Midst the brilliant glare of the gaslight, the centre of attraction for hundreds of eyes, he stood erect before his menacing opponent.

A gong sounded and the fight commenced. From all around came a babel of strange cries, men betting one with another. Micko was a hot favourite. The gallery boys were shouting words of encouragement to Mooney, whom they knew; words of derision at the stranger within their gates.

Ken stood straight up, with head thrown back; Micko bent his forward, and adopted a crouching attitude, while his face bore a sinister look. There was no "funny business" about him this time. He meant to settle this new aspirant to fistic honours as completely and speedily as possible.

For a moment or two they stood, each waiting the other's lead. A few sparring blows were exchanged; then, midst a roar, Micko started in to make things lively. But he reckoned without his host; for Ken, fighting with the coolness of a veteran, parried every blow, or dodged each onslaught, leaving Mooney non-plussed and angry. Then Curtis took a hand in attacking, and "mixed it" with his opponent, succeeding in landing a swinging right on Mooney's nose and a left hook on his prominent jaw. The round ended with Micko hanging on to Ken to avoid punishment.

Now the tide of popularity turned in the stranger's favour. The start of the second round saw Ken a favourite in the betting, and also with the crowd, whose shouts were no longer meant to ridicule.

Again Mooney adopted his rushing tactics. He seemed to know no other way of fighting; but he failed to bustle the Sydney-sider, who, though his blows lacked force, had all the best of the round.

And so the fight went on. Through each succeeding round Mooney was utterly outclassed; but his opponent was unable to administer a blow sufficiently hard to give him his quietus. Though he had not received much punishment, Ken felt his strength leaving him, and when at length the final round was over, and he was declared the winner "on points," he realised that fighting was not a game to be lightly undertaken. He touched the outstretched glove of his battered opponent midst tumultuous applause, and then money commenced to shower into the ring for the loser.

As Ken stood for a moment surveying the sea of faces around him, he started involuntarily as his gaze rested on one man present. There, seated within a few feet of the ring-side, looking at him with what Ken fancied was a look of sneering recognition, was Doods Dixon, the Silver King.

CHAPTER X.

AFTER THE VICTORY.

CURTIS retired to the dressing-room, somewhat discomfited by the sight of Dixon. He felt sure the man had recognised him. If so, his lease of liberty was nearly ended.

"What's up?" asked Jerry, who was rubbing him down. "Yer look as if yer lost instead of won. I won'er tenner in bets. That ain't too bad, is it? What's makin' yer look so joyful?"

"I'm all right, Jerry," said Ken. "Can't help my looks. I'm glad you had a win on me."

"It won't be th' last," said Jerry, enthusiastically. "Fit an' well, y'll beat th' best of 'em."

Ken smiled at the other's faith in his prowess. It was pleasant to know that one, at least, believed in him.

"Ere, put this in yer pocket," said Jerry, as they prepared to leave the room. "I got fifteen quid altogether. Ther's half of it."

"Nonsense!" returned Curtis. "I can't take your winnings. I——"

"Now, none er that rot," said Jerry. "Put that in yer pocket if yer er friend uv mine; if yer not, well——"

Ken put the money in his pocket. "Right O, Jerry," he said, with assumed cheerfulness. "I'm your friend, of course."

The fight of the evening was now in full swing, and Ken took up a position where he could see and be seen by Doods Dixon; but no further look of recognition came from the bookmaker. Curtis began to feel easier in his mind.

"The man did not know him. Why should he? They were never even acquainted, though Dixon might have seen him occasionally at Fenton's place. He'd not remember him. He was foolish to be scared so easily."

Thus Ken persuaded himself that the bookmaker had not recognised him, and turned his attention to the battle that was proceeding merrily. It went the full twenty rounds, ending in a draw. Then, the crowd, fully satisfied with their evening's sport, filed out into the street.

Ken lingered at the entrance to further test Doods Dixon's memory. If he was found out, let the worst come at once, was his thought.

The bookmaker came forth, paused near Curtis; looked at him as he lit a cigar; then passed on with some friends.

Satisfied now that he was safe as far as Dixon was concerned, Ken set out for the outskirts of the city, where Nat Gleeson's stall stood to tempt the hungry wayfarer, homeward bound.

Through the now semi-deserted streets he walked briskly, meditating on the strange trick that fate had played him. A professional pugilist, no less! He had in his wildest dreams never imagined himself playing such a role, though in his youth he had conjured up in

an imaginative brain many fanciful pictures of what the future had in store for him. That, however, was before love had cast its spell, and put all thoughts of roaming from his mind.

He could have laughed aloud. It seemed so ludicrous; but the grim reality of the situation eclipsed its humorous side, and sobered him. He felt no ill effects from his violent exertion, and the money in his pocket lightened his heart somewhat. A little more, and he could take ship to another land. Who could tell? Some day he might return, rich and prosperous, to clear the stain that now rested on his name.

The hotels were not yet closed, and from some sounds of boisterous hilarity proceeded; but soon eleven o'clock struck, and belated thirsty ones had to hurry, or entrance would be denied them.

A wandering minstrel was singing his last song, and quiet and darkness were taking the place of noise and light. Frowsy females, frail creatures of the night, accosted him as he went. He heeded them not, but hurried on to his destination.

At the coffee stall business was brisk. Cheek by jowl the lady of pleasure, man-o'-wars-man, and khaki-clad soldier devoured the succulent saveloy and smoking peas. It was a busy night, and all was harmony with the eaters, who, having all the one object in view, were agreeable.

"What O, pug!" cried Nat, by way of greeting, as Ken appeared. "Did yer win?"

"What do you think?" answered Ken, donning an apron, and commencing to attend to customers as if to the manner born.

"Now, no kid, Harry," said Nat, anxiously. "Straight wire, did yer beat him?"

"I did," said Ken. "It was a good go, but I got the verdict."

"Good enough, lad ! Jerry was right. He ain't a bad judge, let me tell yer."

Pressure of business prevented further conversation for the time being, but very soon the rush slackened. Midnight went by, and with the coming of the Sabbath a solemn quietude settled o'er the slumbering city.

"No more business to-night, Harry," said Nat at last. "I think we'll get er move on. I'll go and get th' moke while you pack up."

In a little while Gleeson returned with the horse, which he kept in a neighbouring stable, and, ere long, they were jogging homeward.

Ken told his companion all about the fight, and of the money Jerry had given him. He urged Nat to take something for his board and lodging.

"Nothing like that, lad," said Nat. "Ain't yer grafted fer yer tucker, and ain't we made a bit out er yer ? That was my money Jerry put on yer, an' I had er bit more on beside. We ain't done too bad, an' we hope to do better yet, I don't mind tellin' yer."

Home was reached without incident, and the stall put in its usual resting place. Jerry was up, waiting the return of the nocturnal victual vendors. Some bottles of beer were on the table, and the remains of a lobster supper. Evidently Jerry had been celebrating his *protégé's* triumph over Micko Mooney.

"Who's birthday ?" asked Nat, inquiringly.

"You're er bute," growled Jerry, addressing Ken. "ter clear out so sudden. I was lookin' everywhere for yer. Yer might er waited for er bloke. Nat could er done without yer f'r once."

"I didn't see any reason for stopping. I thought you would know where I had gone," said Ken.

"Well, I didn't, an' er lot er' th' boys wanted ter meet yer, an' have er drink with yer, an'——"

"I'm glad I cleared in that case," laughed Ken. "I'm no good at that game, Jerry."

"Have er drink now, anyway," said the offended Jerry. "I never thought yer'd do er thing like that. I brought along er few blokes ter drink yer health, but they got tired er waitin', an' done er get."

"I'll know better next time, Jerry," said Ken, taking a glass of beer to please his friend, who was rather "under the influence," and wore a pained expression on his classic features.

"An' yer missed bumpin' er Sydney bloke with whips er brass, whose willin' ter back yer against one er th' best at Cup time."

"I must have made an impression, then," said Ken.

"Yer simply paralysed 'em!" cried Jerry. "They all put yer down as er chump, an' reckoned Micko had er dead easy job on; but they fell in. I was lookin' fer yer when I bumps this Sydney bloke. I know him pretty well; he's er bookmaker, an' so am I—sometimes. 'Come an' have er taste,' he says, an' I went with him. 'That's a pretty smart bloke you was behind ter-night, Jerry,' he sez. 'Not too bad fer er learner,' I sez. 'He comes from Sydney. D'yer know him?'"

"'Never seen him in th' game over there. Where'd yer strike him?' he sez."

"Then I told him how I got ter know yer, an' how yer come ter take on Micko. He seemed quite took up with yer. 'I'll tell yer what, Jerry,' he sez. 'This bloke's worth watchin'; keep him in trainin' an' get er match on with er good man fer Cup week, an' I'll back

him fer any amount they can stake. Don't lose th' run of him whatever yer do. I've got ter go back ter Sydney at once, but I'll be here again soon, so mind yer look after him.' So there y'are, me bloke," concluded Jerry. "There's er chance fer yer. Stick ter Jerry Gleeson, an' he'll see yer through every time."

"And who is this philanthropist who wants to help me achieve pugilistic fame?" asked Ken.

"Who? Why, Doods Dixon," said Jerry. "Ain't yer never heard er th' Silver King?"

CHAPTER XI.

DIXON MAKES A PROPOSAL.

VERA FENTON had found a refuge in the home of her girl friend, Lena Walton, after her father's cruel death. Lena was engaged to Curtis's friend, Fred Duncan. She and her mother were very much attached to Vera, and did all in their power to lighten her burden of trouble. They nursed her through a critical illness, and, on her recovery, she insisted on doing something to support herself. Fred Duncan had obtained a situation for her in a city house as typewriter.

Dixon endeavoured to show her some kindness, but Vera repulsed every advance of his with scorn. In only one thing did she consent to his proposal.

"Your father," he said, "owned a colt that he never saw. It's over at Caulfield, and belongs to you now. Let me get it over for you. It ought to be a good thing. I'll be goin' ter Melbourne fer th' Cups; give me a letter to Grif Thornleigh, an' I'll bring th' colt back with me."

"Yes, you may do that for me," said Vera. "I will write instructions to Mr. Thornleigh to that effect."

Dixon went away looking more satisfied than he had done for some time.

"You'll be sorry, Vera," exclaimed Mrs. Walton, when she heard of it. "If you let that man meddle in

any way with your affairs. Mark my words, he's a thorough bad lot."

Vera did not remain long in the position that Fred Duncan had obtained for her as a typewriter. She found that she was an object of special interest to the other employees of the establishment. They had discovered who she was, and gossiped about the events in which she had been concerned. Everywhere she went she found heads turned to gaze at her, and fancied she heard whispered remarks about herself and her troubles. Dreading publicity above all things, she became nervous and ill. Mrs. Walton, fearing she would break down under the strain, persuaded her to give up her work, at least for a time. So, much against her inclination, she passed her days in idleness. The Waltons strove to keep her mind from dwelling on past events, but that was impossible. She could not forget, and chafed under the load that a cruel fate had placed on her young shoulders.

One morning a letter came for Vera. It was an unusual happening in these days, and set her heart beating rapidly. She hoped, yet feared, that it contained news of Kendall Curtis; but it proved to be from one she wished to hear nothing about—Doods Dixon.

Wondering why he should write to her, Vera unfolded the letter, and discovered a cheque for fifty pounds, accompanied by a short note. It explained that one of her late father's horses had won a race for Dixon on the previous Saturday, and that he was sending Vera the prize money as a present for herself.

Vera at once sought out Mrs. Walton, and handed her the letter.

"What ought I to do?" she asked, when the good lady had read it.

"Do ! Why, keep it, of course, my dear. The fellow knows that it is yours by right. It is conscience money, though no one would suspect Mr. Doods Dixon of having a conscience."

"No, I cannot touch his money," said Vera. "I will send it back. I will take nothing from that man."

"I think you are foolish, dear ; but please yourself. The man is no good, I know ; but then—fifty pounds ! Ah, well, perhaps it would be better to keep out of his clutches. Send it back if you will."

The matron sighed as she handed the note to Vera. A fifty-pound cheque was a novelty, and also a great temptation. It seemed a shame that Vera must not keep it because she mistrusted the sender.

Vera wrote a brief note of refusal, and enclosed the cheque with it.

"I had better send it to Melbourne, I suppose," she said. "Mr. Dixon is there now."

"Yes ; he won't trouble you till after the Melbourne Cup, thank goodness," replied Mrs. Walton ; "and then, if he brings over that horse, you will see him too often, perhaps."

"I don't think so," said Vera. "I will not leave the horse in his hands. I only wish I might never see the man again."

Her wish was not to be gratified, for the same afternoon, on her way home, after posting the letter, she came face to face with Doods Dixon himself. She started back with a little cry of alarm as he accosted her.

"Did I give you a fright, Miss Fenton ?" he asked, smiling, and holding out his hand.

"I—I did not expect—I thought you were in Melbourne," gasped Vera, nervously.

"Came over specially ter see you," said Dixon, withdrawing his disregarded hand.

"See me !"

"Yes ; I want ter talk aboutt something particular. If y'll walk along a bit I'll tell yer."

Vera walked by the man's side for a short distance. He led the way into a little reserve, in which were a few seats, then motioned his companion to be seated. She obeyed wonderingly, half afraid, but curious to know what the man's business was.

"Yer needn't be scared," said Dixon, seating himself at her side. "I won't eat yer in broad daylight, and in full view er the public any'ow."

The man's tone was vulgar and brusque, and Vera drew away from him.

"That's right," he said, with a sneer ; "wouldn't do to get too close to a common bookmaker."

"If you have anything to say, please say it, and let me go," said Vera, interrupting him.

"Very well ; I'll get to business. You got my cheque. I suppose, Miss Fenton ?"

"Yes, and I have just posted it back to you."

"What ! You don't want it ?" he exclaimed. "You must be better——"

"I can accept nothing from you, Mr. Dixon."

"Oh ! You've got all th' old man's silly ideas about me, I suppose. Think I ruined him, and all that rot. You're wrong, Miss Fenton, quite wrong, I assure yer."

"I hope so ; but you have not told me why you have come all the way from Melbourne to see me. I cannot stay long. Please do not keep——"

"I'll tell yer at once, then," he said. "It is to make you another offer. You have refused th' fifty pounds ; perhaps it was not enough. Well, I'll increase it——"



DOODS DIXON MAKES A PROPOSAL.

"I can take nothing——" began Vera.

"Just let me finish, please," went on Dixon. "I want you to come back to your old home, not as a dependent on my generosity, but as its mistress—its owner. I'll give it to yer, together with th' horses and all I own. I've a lot of money, and you can have what you want—dresses, jewellery, carriages—everything. I'm tired of bookmaking, tired of most other things as well. All I want is you. Miss Fenton—Vera, that is why I came here to-day. I want you to be my wife."

Pale as death, Vera had listened to Dixon's speech, and now, as he paused, she tried to answer him; but power of speech seemed for the moment to have left her.

"You are astonished," he continued; "but am I not capable of love as well as other men? I love you, I say, and I want you! Come with me away from this place, where so much trouble has come to you. I will take you to another country, to——"

"Impossible! You are mad to talk to me like this!" cried Vera. "Love! Why, I hate, I detest you, and you know it!"

"I see," he said, with a scowl, and looking angrily at her through his coloured glasses. "Your love is already given—not, I think, to your husband, Horace Wakeman, the murderer, but to Kendall Curtis, the thief. You welcomed the embraces of those two criminals, but you detest the bookmaker, Doods Dixon! It is a matter of taste, I suppose; but, perhaps, I can find a way to alter your determination."

He had been speaking in a manner different to that usually adopted by him, and now resumed the ungrammatical phrases of the bookmaker.

"That is enough," said Vera. "You have had my answer. I am going home."

"One minute. You still think about **this** Curtis?"

"And if I do?"

"Only this: Would you like to see him arrested and convicted?"

"He is not a thief! He is innocent!" cried Vera.

"He'd have er hard job to prove it. Once they get him, he'll go up fer ten years. How'll that suit yer, my dear? It rests with me, or rather, with you, whether they get him or not."

"What do you mean? Do you know——"

"I know where he is, and I intend to have him brought to justice, unless——"

"Where is he?" Tell me!" cried Vera. "Surely you will not do this!" He has not harmed you!"

"He's in Melbourne, herdin' with th' scum er th' city—pugs, magsmen, an' th' like. I've seen him, an' know where to lay hands on him. Oh! he's er beauty all right fer you to be in love with, an' believe in. I suppose he's gone through th' money, because he's takin' on fightin' fer th' few bob thrown into th' ring."

"I do not believe you!"

"No! Well, it's th' truth; an' if yer want ter keep him out er gaol, an' yer own name away from th' public, yer know what ter do. Accept what I have offered you; promise ter be my wife, and I'll see Kendall Curtis safe out er th' country. Refuse, and he will be arrested and tried. You will be again notorious, and Curtis——"

"I will never be your wife!" moaned Vera.

"Nonsense! I ain't as bad as yer think," said Dixon. "Curtis don't care er hang about you. He

cleared out with er woman, an' he's livin' with her or another one in Melbourne now."

"Oh, that will do !" cried Vera. "I want to hear no more !"

"Very well, I return to Melbourne to-night, and by to-morrow night Curtis will be arrested."

"No ! No ! You must not do it !"

"You accept, then ?"

"Give me time to think. I don't know what to do !" said Vera, in agitation. "Give me till to-morrow. Meet me here at this time, and I will tell you."

"Very well, my dear," said Dixon, smiling. "To-morrow it shall be. Till then, good-bye."

Raising his hat, he bowed, and left her sitting there, pale and crushed. As he walked briskly away, his bearded face wore a look of victory.

CHAPTER XII.

VERA GOES TO MELBOURNE.

THE Melbourne express, crowded with passengers for the approaching carnival, raced through the night, pausing not, but rushing madly onward towards the southern capital.

In the corner of a second-class ladies' compartment sat Vera Fenton, already scared at her rash undertaking. The thought had come to her that if she could reach Melbourne before Doods Dixon, she might be able to find and warn Kendall Curtis of his danger. She had acted at once on the idea, and, packing a small travelling bag, she had stolen from the house while her friends were at dinner, and hurried to the railway station. Her worldly wealth amounted to a little more than five pounds, and when she had purchased a second-class ticket to Melbourne, her purse was lightened considerably; but she did not waver in her purpose. After a long wait the train took its place at the platform, and Vera entered, and crouched in a corner of the compartment, fearful that some one on the crowded platform would see and recognise her. Nothing happened, however. At length the train, with its heavy load, moved out of the station, and very soon was whirling through the suburbs, leaving the lights

of Sydney far behind. As she sat there, every moment increasing the distance between her and her home, the seriousness of her act came to Vera for the first time. She was going to an unknown city, where she had not a friend to welcome her, and with but very little money in her purse. What could she do when she got there? How could she hope to find the man she sought? He was a fugitive from justice, hiding, and in dread of discovery; his true name, no doubt, discarded. What use, then, would it be to look for Kendall Curtis? That was the name of a man being searched for by the police. Did she mention that name, it would, perhaps, cause her also to be suspected and watched. It was hopeless; she had been a fool to come at all; she could not help Ken; and what if that which Dixon had said was true, and her lover was unfaithful to her? No; she would never believe that. Whatever else happened, his love for her would remain unchanged. With a mind distracted by a multitude of such thoughts, she passed the weary hours, not heeding the conversation or doings of her fellow-passengers, or noticing how much of her journey had been accomplished.

So the night passed. Dawn found her still with open eyes and aching head, huddled in her corner. At last the flying express drew up at the pretty border station, and Vera had to straighten her cramped limbs and leave the compartment in order to change to the Victorian train. A few turns up and down the platform in the cool air revived her wonderfully. All her courage came back, putting to flight all gloomy thoughts. Already she began to imagine a happy ending to her adventure, but suddenly her face blanched, and her knees trembled so that she almost fell; for, as she turned in her walk, she found her way blocked by

the man she thought she had left far behind in Sydney—Doods Dixon.

Yes, there he stood, his ugly mouth widened in a sneering smile.

"An unpleasant surprise, it seems," he said. "We have an appointment to-day, but you did not expect to meet me so far from the trysting place, eh?"

"I thought you——" gasped Vera.

"Thought y'd slipped me up nicely, I know," he sneered; "but I was lucky enough to catch you. I went up to th' station ter see someone in th' train, and I spotted you in er carriage. It was only you that was keepin' me in Sydney; so when I saw you were off to Melbourne, I thought I might as well go too, and here we are. Now, what about that answer you were to give me to-day?"

"I have no answer other than what I have already given you, Mr. Dixon."

"Then, Curtis goes along as soon as I get to Melbourne, understand that."

"I cannot help it. I will not marry you. If he is arrested he will prove his innocence, I am sure."

Dixon laughed.

"No hope," he said. "The fellow's guilty right enough, and nothing can save him. Come, don't be er fool; think no more about him. We can get married as soon as we get to Melbourne, and never go back ter Sydney again. I'll take yer ter London——"

"No! No! Cannot you be satisfied with that?" cried Vera. "Sooner than be your wife, I would throw myself beneath that train, and——"

"Nonsense, girl! No need to get desperate," he said. "Come along to the train. We may as well travel together th' rest er th' way."

"I prefer to be alone. Please let me pass."

"Oh ! well, seeing that yer friends in Sydney know be this that yer left in th' express with Doods Dixon last night, I——"

"What's that ? What do you mean ?" gasped Vera.

"Oh ! I guessed, when I saw you at th' station, that you were leavin' without tellin' yer friends, so I sent 'em word from Moss Vale not ter worry, as yer were safe with me."

"You brute ! You lying scoundrel !" cried the girl. "They will never believe it ! Let me pass at once !"

Dixon stood aside, and lifted his hat mockingly. "We will meet again in Melbourne, I hope," he said.

Once again the train was rolling onward, and Vera, crushed and trembling with this new terror that had come to her, was borne along once more a prey to an anguished mind.

It was awful, this thought of being branded as the companion of a loathsome scoundrel like Dixon. Surely those who knew her best would know it could not be true.

Through rural Victoria the express rattled with its living freight, and, at length, dashing into the city, completed its journey at Spencer Street Station, up to time, and without a mishap.

Vera seized her scanty luggage, and stepped out on to the platform. Dixon was waiting for her, and put out his hand to take her bag, but she brushed past him, and tried to lose herself in the dense crowd.

Hurrying out into the streets, she walked rapidly on, her only thought being to escape from Doods Dixon. Everything seemed so strange, so foreign to her eyes, and she looked in vain for a familiar face. Many Sydney people were in Melbourne, and she thought,

perhaps, to meet one who might know and advise her. The people knew her not. She went on alone. A tram soon came along. She boarded it, thinking that it would at least take her further from that devil who had marked her for his own.

She alighted when the car had taken her out of the busy thoroughfares, and after some wandering through narrow side streets, she found what she sought—a window displaying a notice, 'Furnished Room To Let,' and here, for the time, her journey ended.

CHAPTER XIII.

A HOPELESS SEARCH.

IT was a most uninviting room that Vera had secured for a weekly rental of six shillings. It contained a bed, certainly, but was almost devoid of other furniture; also, it was dirty, dingy, and dilapidated. Vera was too tired to care about these things; so, after satisfying the demand of the lady of the house for "a week in advance," she threw herself on the soiled bed, and was soon asleep.

When she awoke it was almost dark. For a few moments she could not realise where she was, but when her brain became clear she remembered what had brought her to this place, and the mission she had to fulfil.

After making a toilet with the aid of the damaged articles that served for wash-hand basin and mirror, she donned a heavy black gossamer and let herself out into the street. As she walked rapidly away towards the city, a man who had been lurking in the shadows opposite followed leisurely after. Soon she was in the brightly lighted city streets, and, being very hungry, sought a refreshment-room, where she partook of a frugal meal of tea and scones. She fully recognised now how foolish had been her act, how hopeless was the task before her. What chance had she, unaided, of

finding him whom she sought in this mighty city? Very little; but, having undertaken the task, she would not give in without making an effort.

So she tramped the streets, peering into the faces of men, assembled outside the sporting rendezvous and hotels, but the face she hoped to see came not under her gaze. Some of the rougher men spoke about her as she passed. Then she quickened her pace, all a-tremble, but no one actually accosted her. Once she saw Dixon coming towards her, and she turned and almost ran from him. The hotels were closing ere she gave up her task for the night, and dragged her tired limbs back to her sordid room, all unconscious that throughout the night her every movement had been watched.

The lady of the house protested against her belated home-coming, declared that she was "a respectable widow," and wouldn't have her house given a bad name "be th' likes er you."

Vera did not reply to the respectable widow's insinuations, but went to her room, and, throwing herself on the bed, cried herself to sleep.

Next day she remained indoors, only venturing out to procure a paper. She studied the sporting ads., noted the names of halls where boxing bouts were held, and saw that a contest was to take place that night.

She thought that there might be some truth in what Dixon had said of Ken's pugilistic doings. She knew of his ability as a boxer, but could scarcely credit that a "wanted" man could figure openly before hundreds of spectators, and not be detected.

Night saw her again in the streets. She lingered near the entrance to the Federal, and saw the crowd enter; but Kendall Curtis did not appear to be there.

At last a policeman moved her on with insults. She fled, with burning cheeks, dismayed and disheartened.

The days and nights passed without result. She saw plainly enough that her quest was, indeed, hopeless. What was to become of her. She almost dreaded to contemplate the future. The week end would about see the last of her small stock of silver. Then she must find some employment in order to live. By her own act she had cut herself off from her friends, and could not look to them for help. If Dixon had sent that message to Mrs. Walton, they now believed her to be the companion of the man who had wrecked her father's life.

"Did ever a girl endure so much for the man she loved?" she sighed as she dressed to once more go forth and search for Ken.

As she was leaving her room, the voice of her landlady caused her to pause.

"Step inter th' drorin' room fer er minit, Miss," she called in a voice quite genial compared with its usual harshness.

Wonderingly, Vera entered the usually forbidden chamber dignified with the name of "drawing-room." A man rose to meet her. She shrank back in alarm. Was there no escape from this man she hated?

"So you've found me out?" she gasped.

"You were never lost as far as I'm concerned," replied Dixon, smiling. "From the minute you left the train your movements were known to me."

"Indeed! I'm sorry I do not appreciate your interest in me. What do you want now?" demanded Vera.

"You!" exclaimed Dixon. "No need to tell you that again, surely. Give up this wild-goose chase after Curtis. You won't find him. If you do, it will do him

no good. I guessed your trip to Melbourne was on his behalf; and at first I thought he might er wrote ter yer. I had yer watched. If y'd gone to him, he would er been pinched at once; but I soon saw that yer knew nothing, an' was silly enough to think yer could find him; so I let yer go on till y'd get sick of it. Give it best, Vera; y've no hope. Besides, he don't want yer; he knows yer in Melbourne, and curses yer very name."

"Knows I'm in Melbourne!" cried Vera.
"Curses——"

"Yes, with me. It appeared in the newspapers that I brought you over from Sydney. He saw it, of course. He's goin' th' pace now. Backed er few winners this week, and he's playin' it up. He'll make er bloomer, an' put himself away presently, if——"

"Where is he? Let me go to him!" cried Vera.
"Let me tell him that it's a lie—that I am not false to him; that I believe he is innocent; that——"

"Steady, my dear," interrupted Dixon, again dropping his usual style of speech. "Don't excite yourself; he's not worth it. His innocence cannot be proved. If you consent to my proposal, I will get him away out of the country, where the law cannot reach him. You must submit to the inevitable. He believes you to be my—er—wife; so do your Sydney friends. Why not become so, and forget this fellow?"

"Never, you lying, designing scoundrel! I will never be your wife!" cried Vera.

"What of your good name?" sneered Dixon. "It's the only way to save that now."

Vera sank, pale and trembling, into a chair.

"You have had your answer—Go!" she moaned.

"You must alter it," said Dixon, "and quickly, too. To-morrow is Caulfield Cup day, a busy time for me;

Jerry was hurt at the other's want of appreciation of his friendly advances; still he did not waver in his resolve to "stick."

"He's got th' blues, that's all," he said. "He'll come round later on. I'll keep th' sixty quid; we'll want it all to get him out er this."

So he arranged to leave for Sydney at once to begin his self-imposed task.

Some horse-boxes were attached to the train, and alongside these Jerry lingered for a while. Anything pertaining to a racehorse had an attraction for him. A youth was leaning out of one of the boxes, and Gleeson asked him what horse he was looking after.

"A colt from Caulfield," replied the lad. "It ain't got a name, and it ain't raced; but, if yer ask me, it's a pretty good sort."

"Whose is it?"

"Well, I'm takin' it across fer Doods Dixon, th' bookie," said the lad. "It's a colt that Grif Thornleigh bred from a mare of old Roger Fenton's, th' Sydney trainer, that was murdered a bit ago. They say his daughter——"

The communicative boy was checked in his story by the arrival of Dixon himself. He was very pale, and his left arm rested in a sling. He looked angry as he saw Gleeson; but Jerry stood his ground, and returned his gaze. Before a word passed a slight commotion amongst the crowd diverted their attention. Coming along the platform, followed by a number of curious people, were two men: one was Detective Officer Duff, of Sydney, and by his side marched Kendall Curtis, with lowered head, and "gyves upon his wrists."

He raised his head for a moment, and looked at the two men he knew. His eye caught that of Jerry Glee-

son, but no light of friendly recognition shone from it. Rather was it a look of detestation.

Duff hurried his prisoner into the train, and Jerry sorrowfully sought his own compartment.

Kendall Curtis sat alone with his captor in another part of the train, calm, and in his right mind. All trace of his recent mental disorder had departed. Still, as a necessary precaution, he was handcuffed; but Duff anticipated no trouble. Curtis was resigned to his fate. In fact, he appeared anxious for the affair to end.

"Let them gaol me!" he said, bitterly. "I am innocent; but everyone—the girl I loved, the friends I trusted—all have turned against me. I will not fight against Fate; the odds are too heavy."

His impression of that midnight meeting at Gleeson's was that Jerry was a Judas, and the rest had assisted at the betrayal. All were his enemies. His bitterness was increased by the sight of Jerry in company, as he thought, with Dixon on the railway station, and the knowledge conveyed to him by Duff that the colt made over to him as a wedding gift by Roger Fenton was aboard this very train, being taken to Sydney by Dixon for Vera Fenton.

Through the gathering dusk the train rushed on towards the border, leaving town after town far behind. Duff tried to engage his prisoner in conversation, but Curtis returned but monosyllabic replies to his remarks, and the detective soon left him to the company of his own bitter thoughts.

Light rain had been falling all through the journey, and as the border drew closer it could be seen that the country had experienced a heavy downpour. In fact, over a large area rain had been steadily falling for days. Albury was reached without incident. The transfer

to the Sydney-bound train accomplished, away into the darkness and unceasing rain once more dashed the throbbing engine, bearing its human freight swiftly along the greasy rails. No thought of danger entered the minds of those good people homeward bound. Strong in their faith in those poor mortals on the foot-plate of the engine, who held the lives of so many of their fellows in their keeping, some calmly slept, while others, over whom Morpheus had not cast his spell, played cards, and fought the battles of the turf over again in reminiscent conversation; for the bulk of the passengers were sporting men.

One who had no thought of sleep was Arnold Duff, who sat, alert and wakeful, never once forgetting his responsibility. His charge was seemingly a man resigned to his fate, crushed and spiritless, not likely to cause any trouble; but the detective acted as he would did he have a most violent criminal to look after. He took no chances. Curtis, apparently, slept, his manacled hands resting on his knees. As Duff looked he felt—hardened as he was by his profession of man-catcher—something akin to pity for this fine young fellow, broken spirited, and despondent. His life ruined almost before he had begun to truly live.

The detective sighed, rose, and let down a window to look out into the wet and cheerless night.

Almost at the same moment a long drawn out whistle broke the silence. Three times was it repeated, sounding like the last screams of a despairing soul being cast into an eternity of darkness. All that heard were filled with an unknown dread.

A sudden jolt, as of violently applied brakes, caused the man at the window to stagger. Again the train rushed on unchecked.

Duff turned and gazed at his prisoner. Thoughts of impending danger were in his mind, and the helplessness of Curtis appealed to him.

Then, suddenly, they were both dashed to the floor. A sensation as if the carriage was sinking from them followed. A violent jerk, and the train had stopped.

Immediately water poured in upon them, filling the compartment, forcing the two men upward until they were touching the roof. As they felt that life was being surely crushed out of them there came a crash. The roof was lifted up and borne bodily away. The sides of the carriage were split asunder, and, thus released, they found themselves struggling in a roaring torrent of rushing water.

Kendall Curtis, whirled along by the flood that flowed with all the force of a mill race, fought fiercely to preserve that life which but a short while since he had deemed of no account. He found the battle a severe one. With his wrists chained together, his chance was slight, indeed. Twice he sank beneath the waters, to rise again struggling desperately. Again he was being dragged under, when, throwing up his arms, something hard struck his wrist. There was a click, and he felt that his right arm was free. The blow had opened a handcuff, and given him a better chance of life.

Still the weight dangling from his left wrist handicapped him cruelly. From away up stream he could hear cries of agony and despair. Past him, as he strove to cross the swollen stream, dashed *debris*, to some of which clung frantic beings, calling for the help that could not respond.

He was a swimmer of no mean order, powerful and experienced; but this rushing, turbulent torrent played

with him, and mocked his puny efforts. Without the encumbrance of clothes, and with both arms free, he would have had but little chance. With one limb weighted down, he found he could not maintain the unequal struggle. So at last he gave up, and let the current bear him where it would. He became aware of some black object struggling by his side, some poor beast swimming with a strength born of terror, churning the water with its limbs, and gasping inarticulately as if striving to overcome its dumbness and cry for help. It was a horse, and a halter floated from its neck. Curtis seized the animal by the mane, and clambered on to its back, adding to the poor thing's burden, but seeming to comfort it, for a trusting neigh greeted him. Then the man sought to guide the brave beast's course, and found at length that they were forcing their way gradually towards the bank. At last the horse's hoofs touched earth, and he struggled, trembling, to the high ground.

Curtis slipped from the back of his equine saviour, and sank down exhausted.

Not for long did he remain there. The chain upon his wrist annoyed him, and he struggled to remove it. His hand was not a large one, and at length he succeeded in squeezing it through the iron band, and he was free.

The rain had ceased. A dim light was causing objects close at hand to become visible.

Right in front of him a tree lay in the flood water. Something had become entangled in its branches. Curtis waded in to see what it might be. It was a dead man, the clothes torn from his stiff body, the head a crushed, shapeless thing, with little human likeness.

Ken staggered away, shocked and nauseated, but paused as an idea came to him.

The cadaver was about his own height and build. Well—— He had read of cases of mistaken identity. Why not add another to the record ?

He sought and found the discarded handcuffs, but as he faced again towards the corpse, it slipped from its support, and was carried away.

Ken smiled grimly. "That chance is gone," he muttered, casting the manacles far into the flood. Then he returned to where the horse stood waiting. The moon looked out from amongst the cloud banks, and Ken now saw plainly the beautiful animal that had succoured him. Its brand was plainly visible, and Curtis stared at the letters in surprise. It was Roger Fenton's brand. This, then, must be his own horse. The wedding gift of poor Fenton !

Seizing the dangling halter, he led the colt towards the shelter of the dark fringe of thickly-timbered bush on the hillside.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SLAYING OF ARNOLD DUFF.

WHILE the passengers of that ill-fated train reposed in fancied safety, it was hurrying on to its destruction. All too late the headlight of the engine disclosed to the driver an expanse of rushing water just ahead. The Yibbel Creek, usually a dry watercourse, was a roaring flood. Quick as thought, the driver and fireman acted. The culvert might be washed away, and that meant death. One grasped the throttle valve, the other put the brakes hard on; but they were descending a steep gradient, and their efforts were futile. A momentary check, and then the train plunging into the torrent, in a second was on the bridge. The driver breathed again as he felt it firm beneath him, and turned the steam full on to quickly cross to safety; but the bridge, unable to withstand the weight hurled against it, swayed and rocked. The engine and one car reached the solid road. Then there was a crash, a rending of timber as the oncoming carriages telescoped and burst in the surging stream.

Then followed a scene of indescribable horror as the terror-stricken people fought to extricate themselves from the wreck. To some death had come at once. Others, again, were carried away to battle helplessly with the waters till they could struggle no more.

To a portion of the wreckage clung Arnold Duff. Around him arose heartrending cries of hapless victims; but he was powerless to help. Vaguely he wondered how his late prisoner had fared.

Close by a man was being whirled along, screaming piteously. Duff reached out and grasped him by the shoulder. The other seized him with the clutch of a drowning man, and dragged him from his support. Duff had to fight for his life. This being, horrified at the nearness of death, clung to him desperately. Luckily, one arm only seemed to be of use to him, and he could not enfold Duff in an embrace that would mean death to both.

Vainly the detective sought to escape. Then, as he thought all was over, a large object bore down upon them. It was the roof of a car. Duff grasped it, and with a superhuman effort, dragged himself and his companion on to it.

The two sank exhausted upon the frail raft, its every oscillation threatening to precipitate them into the flood again.

"I reckon this won't hold us for long," said Duff. "Better be ready for a capsize; and don't grab me again, for Heaven's sake. You nearly drowned both of us."

"I'm sorry if I lost my head," returned the other. "If we escape, I'll not forget that you saved my life, Duff."

And Arnold Duff knew by the voice that his companion was Doods Dixon.

In silence they were carried swiftly away, each wondering what the end would be. It came sooner than they had looked for. Fate had been, indeed, kind to them. Instead of being dashed onward to what seemed

certain death, their support carried them to the shore, and grounded in shallow water. The two men struggled to the high ground, their limbs cramped and aching.

"We've travelled some," said Duff, peering up stream through the rain. "I suppose we should thank our Maker for this deliverance," he continued; "but somehow I've forgotten how to pray. I'm thankful all the same. By God ! it was awful !" He shuddered at the ordeal they had come through.

"Let us hope others have been as fortunate as we," said Dixon. "And now, what's to be done ?"

Suddenly Duff looked closely at his companion's face, discernible in the dim light of a clouded moon. Dixon wore a close-fitting travelling cap, with flaps tied tightly under his chin. It had been forced back on his head, and it seemed that the man had recently had his hair closely clipped. The ever-present coloured glasses were now missing from his eyes, and an affrighted look met the detective's gaze. The pallor of the bookmaker's face increased as he raised his trembling hand to his head.

"You ! You !" almost screamed Arnold Duff, coming closer. "God ! I never dreamt of this ! I have lost one prisoner, but, by Heaven !——"

With a curse, Dixon sprang upon the detective, who, in stepping back, slipped on the wet earth. In a moment the bookmaker had him by the throat, on the ground, choking him. Despite the other's struggles, his grip did not relax. With all his power he strove to kill. The doomed man's face grew black; gradually his struggles weakened, until they ceased entirely, and he lay still. The murderer rose and gazed for a mo-

ment at his lifeless victim; then raising the body in his arms, he cast it into the flood, and watched it borne away.

Day was breaking when Doods Dixon arrived back at the scene of the disaster. A pitiable spectacle met his eye. The train, now a confused mass of shattered wood and ironwork, dammed the creek, and over it roared the flood water. On the high ground fires were burning, and around them lay the wounded, and, near by, a row of bodies stiff and stark, with covered faces, told that the death roll was a heavy one.

All through the dark hours following the calamity willing hands had worked to succour their less fortunate fellow-passengers. Some were found penned in the carriages, beyond all human aid, drowned by the rush of water, or crushed by the telescoping cars. Others were discovered maimed, but living, and some had been plucked from the turbid stream, which had carried many, screaming, to their death.

Foremost amongst the band of self-sacrificing helpers had been Jerry Gleeson. He had worked seemingly with the strength of desperation. Many lives did he help to save at the risk of his own. To no cry of entreaty did he turn away. Yet all his thoughts were concentrated on one individual. He was seeking one man, a man whom he had termed his "cobber," and to whom he considered himself bound by all the ties of mateship. But the search was in vain. When it was recognised that no one living could still be in the submerged train, the rescuers ceased their efforts, and gathered round the fires on the banks. Jerry still turned his weary eyes towards the flood, wondering if by any chance Kendall Curtis still lived.

A haggard man, wet and footsore, staggered to the fire, and crouched, shivering over it. It was Dixon; but so white and changed was he that Gleeson hardly knew him.

"So luck stuck ter yer," said Jerry, gloomily. "I thought yer were beat this time."

"I'm still in the running," said Dixon, making a ghastly attempt to smile; "but it was touch and go."

"Yes, it's often th' case," mused Jerry. "A good one comes a cropper, an' er no-good squib wins on his pat, Curtis is among th' missing."

"Oh! I see th' point," sneered Dixon. "I'm th' no-good squib, eh? Ah, well, I'm in no humour to appreciate th' compliment just now; so we'll drop th' subject."

"You do look dead crook," commented Jerry. "I'll get you some brandy."

Gleeson obtained some spirits, and the bookmaker drank eagerly. "Your a good fellow, Gleeson," he muttered.

"Sorry I ain't able to say th' same fer you," said Jerry, moving away.

Two doctors and some nurses had arrived from the neighbouring town of Tumbaroo, and were busy with the sufferers. Vehicles to convey the living and dead to the town were in attendance, and soon nearly all had left the scene of the calamity.

A few lingered. Some who had dear ones with them in the ill-fated train yet to be accounted for. Jerry remained with these grief-stricken ones. Parties had gone down along the banks of the stream, searching for any bodies that may have been cast up, and Gleeson waited, hoping to at least have the mournful satisfaction of gazing on the body of the man on whose behalf

he had undertaken the journey. Afterwards he might as well return to Melbourne. The innocence or guilt of Curtis mattered little now, he thought, as he sat moodily watching the wide expanse of flood water.

Some hours passed, and a gang of men had started work on the washaway ere a search party returned.

On an improvised stretcher lay a body. The waiting people pressed forward eagerly, but each one turned away, shocked and disappointed. There was no claimant for this poor victim of the disaster. Jerry Gleeson alone spoke.

"That," he said to the trooper in charge, as he looked at the corpse of a man with purple face, protruding tongue, and eyes starting from their sockets, "is Arnold Duff, the Sydney detective."

"I guessed so," said the constable. "I wonder what's become of his prisoner: dead, too, there's small doubt."

"He'd have no hope with th' bracelets on, poor devil," sighed Gleeson.

"I believe his hands were free," remarked the policeman, "and that accounts for this." He pointed to the distorted features of the dead man.

"What do you mean?" asked Jerry.

"Look at that face," answered the other. "That man did not die from drowning. He was murdered—choked. See here; look at the finger-marks on his throat; see where the nails dug into the skin, and drew the blood, and——"

"God! you're right!" gasped Jerry. "He was strangled; and you think that——"

"The man who was his prisoner killed him. Who else would want to? It must have happened in the train. He's got round Duff to unlock the handcuffs,

and killed him for his foolish kindness. Then came the accident, and he's been settled also. That's my theory, anyhow."

"Perhaps you're right, constable," said Gleeson; "but I don't believe that Duff would take a chance like that; and I don't believe that th' man he had was th' sort ter choke th' life out of anybody."

They placed the body on a fetler's trolly, and, propelled by two stalwart workmen, the corpse of Arnold Duff glided swiftly away to Tumnaroo.

CHAPTER XX.

JERRY INTERVIEWS FRED DUNCAN.

FRED DUNCAN sat in his room at home, thinking sorrowfully of the tragic fate of Kendall Curtis.

Before him lay the evening papers, their columns black with sensational headlines referring to the previous night's railway disaster near Tumbaroo.

He had been reading the very latest particulars wired from the country town where the inquest was being held. A special column was devoted to the death of Arnold Duff. Medical evidence had established the fact that the detective had been done to death, not by the flood, but by some human agency. He had been murdered, and public opinion fixed on Kendall Curtis as most likely to have done the deed.

Duncan was overcome with horror as he read that the man who had been his intimate friend from boyhood had been driven to such a dreadful state of desperation as to choke the life out of a fellow-being. It was awful to contemplate. He had all along believed in Kendall Curtis; he would not entertain an idea that his friend was a thief. He could not explain the mystery of his disappearance, even to his own satisfaction; but he felt sure that somehow Curtis had fallen into a trap set by an unscrupulous enemy. Why should he commit a robbery? And on his wedding day! The idea was preposterous. He owed no man a shilling; had no thought for any woman but Vera Fenton; and

his account at the savings bank had not been drawn upon. There was no need, no earthly reason that he should decamp with his employers' money, and basely desert his affianced wife. Duncan, for one, did not believe him capable of such conduct. He had been forced to the conclusion that his friend was dead—murdered for that bag of money. He had for some time been engaged in the task of trying to elucidate the mystery, but his efforts had been of no avail. The surprising news of the arrest of Kendall Curtis in Melbourne put an end to his work as an amateur detective. Now, following close upon that came the sad finale. Curtis had been hurled into eternity to face his Maker, with the brand of Cain upon him, and the truth would never be known.

"Ah, well !" sighed Fred, rising, "I can do no more. The thing is finished; best try and forget it. I'll go and see Lena, instead of moping here."

As he was putting the finishing touches to his toilet, a knock came to his door, and his sister's voice called :

"There's a man to see you, Fred; a stranger. Will I ask him in ?"

"Yes," answered Fred. "I'm coming down now."

Strange men were not unusual callers since Duncan had assumed the role of detective. He thought this man's business would have reference to his work in that direction.

He found a shrewd-looking man, of short stature, with clean-shaved face, of the type known as "hard," awaiting him.

"Are you Mr. Duncan ?" he asked.

"I am," said Fred. "And you ?"

"I ain't got me card case, but me name's Gleeson—Jerry Gleeson."

"From Melbourne !" exclaimed Duncan, eagerly. "Then you have come about poor Curtis ? I saw your name mentioned in the papers at the time of his arrest. Did he ask you to come and——"

"That's right," said Jerry. "I came about Harry—that is, Kendall Curtis. He was always Harry to me, y' know; but he never asked me to. He never mentioned yer name or anyone else's ter me, or spoke about his affairs at all. If he had, things might er bin different. No; I was sent ter yer be er lady—Miss Fenton, poor Harry's girl, what was——"

"And Mrs. Dixon that is, I suppose ?" interrupted Fred.

"No, she ain't, 'n never will be. Don't you make no bloomer about that !" cried Jerry. "That's th' worst er some people—jumpin' at conclusions, an' condemning er girl without first——"

"But she went away with the man. He wired to say she was with him on the train. They arrived in Melbourne together. One paper, at least, announced that much, and spoke of their marriage."

"And you and her other friends who oughter know better believed it of her," sneered Gleeson. "It's all dam lies. She was never with Doods Dixon—wouldn't touch th' coat with er clothes prop. It was this way, Mister : Dixon sees Harry in Melbourne th' night he got th' decision again Micko Mooney at th' Federal. He never let on; but gets away ter Sydney be th' next day's express, asks Miss Fenton ter marry him, an' she says no. Then he tells her that Kendall Curtis is in Melbourne, an' if she don't marry him, he'll put Curtis away; an' if she does, he'll help th' bloke ter do er guy out er th' country. She bluffs him off with a promise ter give him er answer next day, rushes

home, packs her bag, an' takes that very night's train fer Melbourne, with th' silly idea that she'd bump her bloke waitin' about for her somewhere. She wanted ter warn him that Dixon would put th' Johns on his track, an' tell him that, in spite of all, she'd not chuck him over. Dixon was on th' station, spots her in th' train, an' decides to go be that train, too. The telegram was sent with the idea of gettin' her into his clutches be makin' her friends think she'd gone away with him willingly. He forced his company on her, but she got away from him in Melbourne, an' took a room. He found her out, an' tried ter compel her ter marry him, an' bribed th' woman that she was livin' with to help him. Th' thing was fixed fer Cup night; but th' woman let th' girl go, an' done Dixon in. She wandered about th' streets all night. Somethin' at last guided her to a coffee stall kept be er real man, with er heart—me own brother, Nat Gleeson. He brought her home, an' she got there jist in time ter see th' bloke she'd bin lookin' fer in th' grip er th' Johns, with Doods Dixon lookin' on. Harry cursed her. He was mad with drink 'n jealous rage, an' thought she'd turned him up fer that dog, Dixon. He got away, an' fired at Doods, an' winged him. Then they dragged him out handcuffed, an' ravin'. Dixon, even then, has th' hide ter want th' girl ter go with him; but she ordered th' bounder off, an' Nat made him quit his homestead pretty quick."

"Poor girl! Poor Vera!" said Fred, as the other paused. "We've wronged her sadly; but we'll try and make amends. Where is she now?"

"With real friends," answered Jerry, "who'll stick—Nat an' Min Gleeson—not toffs, an' without much polish, but real white, an' that's God's truth, though

it's their brother what sez it. They'll see she comes ter no harm."

"She sent you to me, I think you said, Mr. Gleeson?"

"That's right; an' I've got er letter fer Mrs. Walton. Y' see, I've got er few quid, an' I left Melbourne ter see Ken Curtis through his trouble. I know something that might have helped ter get him out. He never took that money, Mr. Duncan, no more 'n I did; an' if I'd on'y known at first who he was, I might er got at th' true tale before this; an' now——"

"Now it is too late," said Duncan. "Poor Ken is dead, and nothing matters to him. The thing is finished."

"It ain't, as far as I'm concerned," cried Jerry. "I ain't easy shook off once I take on er job; an' I promised Harry's girl I'd prove his innercence, an', dead er alive, I'll go on with it. It might'n make no diff'rence ter him what's dead, but what about th' man what's responsible fer it all? Is he goin' ter be let go scot free? Not if I c'n do anythin' ter send him erlong. Someone's done er lot er crook work ter ruin Curtis an' separate him from his girl, an' I reckon Doods Dixon's in it up ter his neck; an' if I'm right, he'll have ter answer fer it."

"At the time of Ken's disappearance Dixon was not a suitor for Miss Fenton's hand," said Fred. "Another man, Horace Wakeman, was the one in whose way Curtis stood. I don't think Dixon——"

"I'll bet er bit Dixon was in the game, any'ow," interrupted Gleeson. "He's a shrewd pea, an' he played ter beat both Wakeman an' Curtis. He's got er clear run now, but he ain't goin' ter win if I c'n block him. I'm goin' ter try an' clear Ken Curtis's name fer

th' sake er that girl, an' put Doods Dixon where he can't bother her no more. Are yer with me or not?"

"I'm with you, Mr. Gleeson," answered Fred, holding out his hand.

Gleeson took the outstretched hand and shook it heartily. "Me name's Jerry," he said, "an' I don't want no misterin'. I'll get ter work at once, an' with er bit er luck things 'll pan out all right fer th' girl at th' finish."

"We won't be able to restore her lover, worse luck," sighed Duncan.

"Y' never c'n tell," said Jerry. "Most people are satisfied he's dead. It's any odds again' him bein' alive, I know; but I'm a gambler, an' willin' ter stake er bit on th' off-chance. Y' wouldn't expect him ter report himself if he *did* manage ter get out, would yer?"

"No; but——"

"Well, I'm taking th' odds that he's alive," continued Gleeson.

"The wish is father to the thought, no doubt," said Fred; "but I don't agree with you. Poor Ken! He'd be better dead, anyhow."

"What yer talkin' erbout?" cried Jerry. "Better dead! You're er nice bloke!"

"He'd be better dead than to live with murder on his conscience," replied Fred. "You must not forget that he is suspected of having killed Arnold Duff. Did he escape, he must remain in obscurity for ever, in dread of the gallows."

"You make me tired," growled Jerry, scornfully. "Yer ready ter believe anything they say about er cobber. I don't believe he choked th' D', an' if he did, he was drove to it. More likely some drowning man gripped him ter save his own life. Any'ow, that ain't

goin' ter shake me off. I'm goin' right on with th' job."

"And I'm going to help you, Jerry," cried Fred; "so consider it settled. We'll go out now, and deliver that note you have for Mrs. Walton. They'll be glad to know that Vera has not fallen into Dixon's clutches, after all."

"And ashamed er themselves fer believing she had," muttered Jerry. "If they ain't, they oughter be."

CHAPTER XXI.

A THREAT OF BLACKMAIL.

THE ordeal through which Dixon had passed on the night of the railway disaster left him nerve-shaken and ill. He dreaded the coming of night. Unable to command the sleep he so much needed, he would lie with unclosed eyes, till shadowy forms seemed to flit about the room. Almost screaming with terror, he would rise, and, seizing a small syringe, inject the dreaded morphia to gain rest.

The death of Kendall Curtis gave him great satisfaction, for several reasons; but the loss of the Zalinski colt he considered a great misfortune; for much was expected of the horse. He still hoped to win Vera, but would let time heal her wounded feelings ere renewing his suit. He believed that if he played his cards well, sooner or later she would accept him as her husband.

Meanwhile, he resolved to devote his whole time to business. If his luck kept good, in a few months he would have sufficient money to give up the game. His horse, Momus, was good enough to win a big race. He would get the disqualification removed, enter him for one of the big events of the coming year, and back him for a pile of money. The horse was undoubtedly a champion; but, apart from that, there was a way by which an unscrupulous moneyed man could make a

race almost a certainty. He would stop at nothing. If he was successful—and of defeat he would not think—then farewell to the black past in Australia. With Vera he would live an untroubled life in another land. Such were his thoughts when the demon of insomnia granted him a brief respite from mind torture; but when he was reminded of his shattered nerves and weakened constitution, he feared a break-down ere his purpose was accomplished.

The presence of Jerry Gleeson in Sydney annoyed him. That Jerry was searching for one Ginger Champley, in connection with the Curtis affair, he knew. He had thought the matter finished with Curtis's death, and wondered what Gleeson's object was. However, he took steps to make his task hopeless. Knowing Champley's whereabouts he sent for him. The man came one night soon after. A thick-set, clean-shaved, red-headed fellow, with the sharp, cunning facial expression of those that exist by preying on their fellow-men.

"What O ! Doods," he exclaimed, familiarly, on entering the bookmaker's sanctum. "How's th' game now ?"

Dixon did not receive his visitor in the same spirit of comradeship.

"Sit down," he said, curtly. "I won't keep yer long."

"Why this sudden coolness ?" queried Champley, sitting down, and helping himself to a stiff nip from a decanter of brandy that stood on the table. "Methinks the elevation of the Silver King from the democracy of the flat to the company of the tony toffs of the saddling paddock has had a tendency to make him disown th' cobbers of his——"

"That'll do," broke in Dixon. "I don't want any speeches. You were never a cobbler of mine. I've had assistance from yer, I know; but I paid yer well, an' I've put some good things in yer way. A matter of business, that's all; apart from that I don't know yer."

"Oh ! don't yer ?" said Ginger, somewhat nettled at the other's manner. "You've put a few quid in me pocket all right, and you've put some knowledge in me brain box about th' way you've played th' game, that 'ud bring yer down with er bump if I was ter turn dog. It'll pay yer better to adopt a different tone with yours truly. I'm very sensitive, Doods, you know," he continued, with a grin, as he helped himself to another brandy. "I'm easily——"

"Shut up !" snapped Dixon. "Y're good on th' flute, anyhow; but I didn't bring yer here to wrangle, but just to put yer fly to something that's goin' on."

"Yes; what's doin' ? Spit it out, lad; I'm all ears." Champley lay back in his chair, lit one of Dixon's cigars, and puffed away contentedly. "Don't hurry, old chap," he said; "this is my night off, and I'm enjoying myself immense."

Dixon scowled at his smiling visitor through his glasses.

"You seem to be," he growled. "Anyhow, I'm not, and I've no time to waste; so I'll tell you at once what you've come to hear."

"Let 'er go," murmured Ginger, languidly.

"You remember that Curtis affair ?"

"Well, it ain't so long ago that er man 'd forget it," answered Champley. "What about it ?"

"Inquiries are being made with the object of getting at th' truth."

"That all ? Hasn't that been going on all the time ? And now the bloke's dead, it'll die out," commented Champley.

"No ; they're goin' on with it all the time, and it ain't th' police I mean," said Dixon. "It's private individuals, and they've got a little more to go on."

"A clue, eh ? What is it ?"

"You !"

"Me !" cried Champley, suddenly interested. "What do you mean ?"

"You were seen putting Curtis on board th' Melbourne boat. The man that saw you became friendly with Curtis, who lived with him in Melbourne under another name. The man never knew who he was or anything about him till he was arrested ; then he said he'd see him through ; and, as he recognised you on th' boat, he thinks you know something. He came to Sydney to find yer, and, although Curtis is settled, Gleeson is goin' on with it."

"Gleeson !" said Champley. "What, Jerry Gleeson ?"

"That's right !"

"Oh ! don't get yer inside tied in a knot about Jerry. He's the right sort ; I'll go and see him."

"Take my advice an' don't," said Dixon. "He's not alone in this, an' he'll put yer pot on if he can, right sort er not."

"I never thought it of Jerry," sighed Ginger. "A man does not know who to trust in this sinful world. What're yer going to do ?"

"Me ! It's nothing to do with me !" cried Dixon. "I'm only warning you for your own sake. I'd strongly advise you to disappear for a while."

"Nothing to do with you!" repeated Champley, in astonishment. "You're dead strong, after putting me on to th' job!"

"I'm not in it at all. A friend of mine simply asked me to find two men for a ticklish job: men who would stop at nothing for a few quid, and who could hold their tongues. I picked you as the man best suited."

"And I'll not forget it, Doods, me lad. You paid me a high compliment, I assure you."

"You chose your companion yourself, and, with my friend, planned and carried out the affair, which, I believe, paid you handsomely. I was not interested in any way."

"Yes, it panned out pretty well," mused Champley. "Five hundred jim between me and Doc Farrell. Your friend—your lady friend, Doods—took nothing. She was a philanthropist—did the thing for the sole benefit of two deserving fellow-beings. She was a wonder, Doods. I never expect to meet her equal. Fixed up the whole thing on her ace. Doc was to pick her up with a four-wheeler, and drive her to the bank. I'm to have another vehicle waiting up be th' Town Hall. The old girl took on the 'scientific' part of the work herself, and made no bloomer. I'm waiting by the open door of my cab, not too sure how things was going to go, when up dashes Doc, and pulls up alongside. Before a man could say 'How is it,' th' lady was out of Doc's cab and stowed away in mine, with Curtis unconscious alongside of her. It was marvellous! In broad daylight! Scores of people passing, a John just across the road, and not a soul saw the thing done! I was off down Druitt street into Kent street in a jiff, and never stopped till we got to a little pub down on the Rocks. Then out jumps my live passenger, and

God strike me dead if it's a woman at all ! but a man, Doods ! a grey-bearded man ! Blime ! that bloke was clever !"

Ginger took some more brandy before continuing.

"A marvel !" he went on. "He'd 've made the cleverest magsman in Australia. It's a pity he messed things up, and had to——"

"Why ! Do you know who he was ?" cried Dixon.

"Well, I ain't quite as shrewd as some," answered the other ; "and I admit that it had me beat for a good while ; and it wasn't till about th' time that Roger Fenton was murdered in this very house that I took a tumble. The woman that Doc drove to the bank, and who turned into an old man as I drove to Miller's Point, was th' man that struck down old Fenton—Horace Wakeman——"

Dixon, white as death, looked round the room, as if expecting to see something. Then he stretched out a trembling hand, and poured himself out some brandy, which he drank at a gulp.

"Good Lord ! you look as if y'd seen a ghost ! Are you ill ?" cried Champley.

"No, no ! It's nothing," gasped Dixon. "I've not got over that accident yet. I'm a bit weak. Go on."

"Yes," continued Ginger ; "it was Horace Wakeman, without a doubt, and I'm sorry he lost his block and settled Fenton. Just my luck !"

"What do you mean ?"

"Why, look what th' knowledge meant ter me ? I'd 've been on velvet, and I'd 've made him pay pretty high to keep me silent."

"Oh ! blackmail was the idea," sneered Dixon.

"And a d—— good thing it would have been for me, too," said Champley.

"Perhaps," remarked Dixon. "And did you let the other fellow into the know, too?"

"Not likely! It was all me own," answered Ginger. "But me luck was out. Well, to finish about that day. We got Curtis into the pub, and Wakeman left the rest to me, hinting that I ought to settle Curtis for good. Murder wasn't in my line, and I suggested putting him on board some boat.

" 'Do as you like; only get rid of him,' he said. 'He must not be allowed to remain in Sydney alive.'

"He handed me the bag of money, and left in a hurry, and I agreed to let him know through the papers where I'd shipped Curtis to by just putting the name of the place in the personal column. I never saw him after, and when I found out who he was, it was no good to me. Doc soon turned up. He'd drove to the railway, and left his empty cab on the stand, and cleared out. When the bloke comes round a bit we put whisky into him until he was shikkered; then I took him down to the 'Murrubee.' I put the single word 'Melbourne' in the *Herald*, and when Wakeman saw it, he'd know where Curtis was bound for. He was clever, all right," concluded Champley, with a sigh of regret, "after carrying out that job, to turn up smiling at the church and marry the bloke's girl! I tell you, Doods, we'll not strike one like him again. He was th' dead finish!"

For a few moments neither man spoke. Champley imbibed more brandy, and sat shaking his head in a maudlin way, seemingly overcome with the recollection of Horace Wakeman's cleverness. The other rose and paced the room, with haggard face, Champley's recital of the undoing of Curtis seeming to have upset him greatly.

"See here," he said at last, pausing before his visitor; "you'll have to clear out. This thing must be allowed to die. While you are here there is danger. No one dreams of my connection with the matter. Curtis is dead, Wakeman may be also; there remains only yourself and Farrell who know anything."

"Doc's doin' two years in Goulburn," murmured Champley.

"Good! Well, it amounts ter this: You are suspected of having had a hand in the affair, and, for the present, you must disappear, or——"

"I might, an' I mightn't."

"You must; it's a case of——"

"Look here, Doods Dixon!" cried Ginger, rising unsteadily to his feet, "you won't get rid of me so easily. I'm a bit shikkered, but I ain't too tight to see that you're more interested in this than you make out. Yer can't kid me that it's for Ginger Champley you're concerned. Not much! Yer afraid that you might get shown up y'self. I've been a bally fool, whipping th' cat because I'd lost th' chance of bleeding Horace Wakeman, when I could 've worked th' game on Doods Dixon! Look here, Mr. Dixon, I'm broke; not a bean left out of that £250. I want some brass, an' you're the bloke that's going ter fix me up!"

"You can go to the devil!" cried Dixon, angrily. "You won't blackmail me! I had nothing to do with the thing, I tell you!"

"Oh! all right, then; there's no harm in me going to Jerry Gleeson, and telling him a little tale about——"

"And get y'self pinched," said Dixon. "You're not such a chump!"

"No chance, old cock. How about a conscience-stricken bloke going and making a confession to th'

police ? Full of grief for the harm he's done, he wants to clear the name of a poor, unjustly-accused young man, who has gone aloft, and bring the man who tempted him to do the wicked work to justice ? I'd be a hero, Doods, and th' parsons would weep with joy over a sinner brought to repentance——”

“You'd turn King's evidence, you mean, you miserable hound !” cried Dixon. “What is it you want from me ?”

“Ah ! that's more like th' talk, dear old chap,” grinned Ginger. “Don't let us part in anger. I'll go away for a bit to please you if——”

“How much do you want ?”

“Just a trifle to go on with, old fellow,” answered Champley, sitting down again. “Say a hundred for a start. I'll run down to New Zealand for a change; my health is not what it should be.”

“It'll be bad for your health if yer come back again,” growled Dixon. “I'll give you a hundred, and if you trouble me again I'll blow your —— brains out !”

“Oh ! what an awful thing to say ! But there, you don't mean it, do you, dear boy ?” said Champley, taking another nip of brandy. “Here's to our next merry meeting.”

Dixon left the room, trembling with anger. When he returned, his visitor's head was on the table, and he was half asleep. The bookmaker stood over him for a moment.

“He is completely in my power,” he muttered. “One blow, and——” He paused, and pressed a hand to his burning forehead. “No, no !” he cried, “I could not bear another murder on my conscience !”

Seizing Champley by the shoulder, he shook him roughly.

"Here's the money," he said. "Now, get !"

Ginger staggered to his feet, and grasped the roll of notes.

"Doods," he hiccoughed, "you're a toff. I'll never desert yer. Take no notice of what I might er said, ole fellow; I didn't mean it, really. Goo'-bye, dear ole boy, an' don't forget Ginger Champley's yer friend all th' time."

Dixon closed the door on his voluble friend without replying to his affectionate adieu, and, returning to his room, sank into a chair, a trembling, broken-nerved man, the embodiment of misery and despair.

CHAPTER XXII.

ROUSEABOUT AT BOOMELANA.

SHEARING is always started rather late in the year at the stations situated in the hills of the Upper Murray. Owing to a variety of reasons, chief of which were a change of ownership and rain, operations were delayed even later than usual at Boomelana. It was well into December ere the first blow was struck in the old bark woolshed. Boomelana was but a small place, running some 10,000 head of sheep. Blade shears had not yet been superseded by the combs and cutters of up-to-date shearing machines; but Durward Seton, the new owner of the station, was having a new shed built, in which all the latest machinery was to be installed, in readiness for the next season.

Durward Seton was a fine, handsome man, of about forty years of age. One of the best type of Australian pastoralists, popular and respected by all classes. He had owned a large run in the Riverina, which had made him a very rich man, in spite of drought and rabbits. Labour troubles had not bothered him, for he always paid top prices for his labour, and crushed no man. He had married the girl of his heart, but, after ten years of happiness, she had met her death through a fall from her horse.

Overcome with grief, Seton broke up his home, sold his station and racehorses at a sacrifice, and, placing his children with a relative, left the country. After four years of wandering, he returned, still heart-sore, purchased Boomelana, in the hill country, and repaired there, resolved to remain true to his lost love.

Seven shearers constituted a full board at Boome-lana. Not a very imposing array when compared with the small army employed at the big sheds; but enough to make the shed quite a hive of industry, and keep the rouseabouts continually on the go. Of these necessary members of the staff of a shearing shed there were four, and two boys "picking up," a wool-roller, and a presser; also a kind of general rouseabout, whose duties were multifarious. The latter was a tall, well-built, athletic young man, with a short, light-brown beard, and thick wavy hair that badly needed cutting. He was dressed in a much-too-small suit of dirty, dungaree overalls, a shapeless hat, and the ruins of a pair of blucher boots. A man on whom a casual observer would not bestow a second glance. He was kept busy, and had no time to bother about his appearance, even did he so desire. At six o'clock work started. At the sound of the bell each shearer plunged into his pen, which had been filled overnight, and dragged out a scared, but usually non-resisting, sheep. At once the shears were clicking all along the "board." The belly wool was quickly off, and whisked away by the boys. Fleeces soon followed, and the pickers-up ran with them to the wool table. With a rapidity born of custom, the wool-roller skirted and rolled the fleeces, and threw them into the bins. The man in the dungarees gathered up the discarded pieces and placed them in different bales hung to receive them, according to

quality. He was not an expert piece picker, but the "boss o' the board" showed how it was done, and he did his best to wrestle with a rapidly accumulating heap of wool. Soon a pen was empty, and a hoarse voice yelled impatiently, "Sheep O !" The rouseabout, awakened to his responsibility, rushed into the sheep and urged the obstinate creatures into the shearer's catch-pen. Then another pen wanted filling, and presently the presser required his services to pass him the rolled fleeces to fill a bale in the press. He made another start on his "pieces," only to be called on to lend his weight to the lever of the press. Again to the catch-pens ; then, perhaps, to rush with the tar pot when a clumsy shearer cut a sheep, and called "Tar here !" and back again to the pile of "bellies and pieces."

So he was kept going throughout the day ; the spells for "Smoke O," meals, and afternoon tea and cakes being veritable God-sends. Shearing ceased for the day at six o'clock, but the rouseabout was not yet at liberty. He helped count and brand the shorn sheep, and fill the shed in readiness for the next morning. Then he went to the hut, and, having washed and donned a clean shirt and trousers, and knotted a handkerchief around his neck, he made his way to dinner. Boomelana, being a small place, a separate cook for the shearers and shed hands was not employed. All hands dined at the homestead, with Durward Seton at the head of the table. The general rouseabout looked more presentable now, as he took his seat. His manner of dining and a touch of refinement in his speech told Seton that he was not of the ordinary bush type, but a city-bred man. He was called Harry Gordon ; but, if Seton had known a certain somewhat notorious Sydney man, and forgot for the moment that that man was dead, he

might, perhaps, have recognised him in this common, pound-a-week, bearded and burnt shed hand.

For he was Kendall Curtis.

But Durward Seton had never known Curtis, nor had anyone at Boomelana; and he was safe from recognition.

There is no need to follow in detail Kendall Curtis's wanderings since that fateful October night.

Ere he turned his back on that scene of horror he was to witness one more incident of the drama in which he had played so prominent a part. As he crouched beside the trembling horse in the scrub on the hillside, and looked down at the flood from which he had been delivered, he saw a dark object hurled on to the bank by the rushing water. From it two men arose, and the watcher feared that he would be discovered, and turned to fly. Glancing back, he paused in wonder, for one of those men had sprung upon the other, and in the moonlight he saw one borne to the ground, with the other's hands gripping his throat. Forgetting his own position, Curtis made to dash down to drag the murderer from his victim. Too late. Even as he emerged from his hiding place, he saw that the foul work was done. The murderer rose. Raising the other's body, he cast it into the torrent, and fled up towards where Curtis stood. Hiding once more among the bushes, he saw the man rush by wild-eyed and white with terror. His heart stood still as he looked; for the flying, wild-eyed man was his enemy, Doods Dixon.

Wondering, Ken led his horse through the bush. All night long he travelled, o'er hill and through gully. When day dawned he found a hiding place, and slept.

Thus journeying by night and resting by day, they went on through country where roads were not and settlers were few.

Once Ken secured some newspapers with a full record of the railway disaster. He read an account of his own supposed tragic end. Saw with horror that the man who had been strangled was Arnold Duff, and that he was credited with the murder.

"So," he muttered, "Kendall Curtis is a murderer as well as a thief. Strange that the crimes of guilty men should be allowed to rest on the innocent. Ah, well! What does it matter? Kendall Curtis is dead, and there must be no resurrection."

Satisfied now that he was in very little danger, he travelled openly, and so, at last, he came to Boomelana.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

THREE weeks saw Boomelana cut out. Curtis received his modest cheque, and prepared to resume his wanderings. Before he left, however, Durward Seton had something to say to him. It concerned Ken's horse.

"That's something pretty good you've got," said the squatter. "What will you take for him?"

"Not for sale, thank you," answered Curtis.

"Where did you get him?"

Ken was annoyed at Seton's questions, but replied quietly: "The horse was given me by a friend, since dead. I can tell you no more."

"All right, my lad," said Seton; "I won't be inquisitive. I've looked this fellow over once or twice; he's a racehorse, every inch of him; and I'd make you an offer, if he was for sale, but, as he's not, that ends it. Where are you off to now?"

"Anywhere, where I can get a job."

"Why not stop here?" continued Seton. "My boundary rider has found the attractions of a fair creature in the pub at Cuneen's Crossing too great to resist, and has departed to bask in her smiles till his savings are swamped. Will you take his place?"

"Well, I'm not a——" commenced Curtis.

"Not an experienced bushman, eh?" said Seton. "I know that, my lad; but you don't want to be a genius to make a good boundary rider. You ride well enough; that's half the battle. You'll get on all right, Gordon. I'm willing to trust you. I know that a city man does not usually bury himself in the bush unless there is a story behind it; but if you stay, I'll give you a fair chance, and ask no questions. What do you say?"

"I'll stop," said Ken; "and I thank you very much."

"That's good. Now, go and take possession of the hut, and make yourself comfortable. To-morrow, I'll show you round."

Curtis was highly pleased. This was just what he had wished for. Here could he live, secure from the prying eyes of his fellow-men. As far as the world that had known him was concerned, he might be dead in reality. For twelve months he would live in seclusion, saving his money. Then for a new life in a new country.

Durward Seton found Ken an apt pupil. Before many days had passed they were on a footing almost of friendship. The squatter himself had known trouble, and found something in his new employee that appealed to him. He felt that they had something in common, for he judged that Curtis had experienced sorrow. He asked no questions, but hoped that some day Curtis would confide in him, so that he might help him. So, quite unknown to himself, Kendall Curtis found a friend who, knowing him not, yet believed in him.

The days passed pleasantly enough. As far as a man could be who was condemned to a lifelong exile from all he had held dear, Ken was happy.

Christmas came and went. The days of the new year passed uneventfully.

Durward Seton's maiden sister, a sweet-faced lady, ten years his senior, arrived at Boomelana, bringing the squatter's children, sturdy Rupert, and winsome little Madge. Henceforth, all was sunshine at the homestead.

Business, at length, took Seton to Melbourne. He promised to return quickly; and, as his sister was feeling the want of companionship of her own sex, he told her that he would try and bring back a lady who would be a companion for her and a governess for the children.

The squatter did not linger in the Southern capital, for within ten days of his departure, a message came, announcing his return. It ran :

"Have buggy at Crossing Thursday; meet coach; lady and myself."

"So, he's found a suitable companion for me, seemingly," commented Miss Seton. "I hope he has heeded my advice, and selected one well past the romantic age."

Ken left on the Wednesday for Cuneen's Crossing, driving Seton's double-seated buggy and pair of dark chestnuts. He arrived at dusk, and stayed the night at the "pub" dignified by the name of "The Warrigal Hotel."

The coach arrived to time next morning. Ken saw Seton spring down and help from the box-seat a veiled, girlish figure, clothed in black. He took no further notice, but busied himself with the luggage, which he carried to the hotel yard and placed in the buggy in readiness for starting.

Ken had dined early, and waited by his horses' heads till the others had refreshed themselves.

At last they came. Durward Seton stepped from the hotel door, and by his side walked the lady. Her veil was thrown back, allowing the sunshine to play on her pale but beautiful face. Curtis looked at her, and he, too, became pale—pale as death. He stood rigid, as if paralysed by some terrifying spectre.

With his personal appearance he had not concerned himself for months past. His beard was bushy and untrimmed, his hair long and unkempt; clothes untidy, ill-fitting, and shabby; his leggings worn and broken, while the broad leaf of his hat effectually shaded his eyes.

Moreover, was not Kendall Curtis a dead man? But in that trying moment he thought not of those things. All he realised was that he *was* Kendall Curtis: One known to men as a thief and murderer, and here, coming towards him, was the one who knew him best of all. He could not be deceived; for the girl now close upon him was she whom he held dearest of all things on earth; the girl whom he had loved and lost—Vera Fenton!

CHAPTER XXIV.

"I AM KENDALL CURTIS."

"**W**HAT'S up, Harry? You look sick, or scared!" cried Seton. "Have you had any breakfast?"

The squatter spoke a little crossly, as Curtis's strange look caused a suspicion of drink to enter his mind.

The voice recalled Ken. He recovered himself with an effort, staggering slightly, and grasping the buggy shaft for support.

"I'm all right," he gasped. "Everything's ready for starting, Mr. Seton."

"Good. Then we'll get away at once," said Seton. "Miss Fenton, allow me——" He made to assist Vera to a seat in the vehicle, but paused. "I'd better introduce you," he muttered.

"Harry, this is Miss Fenton. She is going to stay at Boomelana for a while. Miss Fenton, Mr. Harry Gordon."

Ken murmured something unintelligible, and bowed awkwardly; but Vera advanced upon him with outstretched hand, and how could he refuse to take it? Their hands met, the man's all a-tremble, the woman's firm and steady.

"I hope we shall be friends," said Vera.

That hand-clasp told Curtis that Vera knew him not; but he could not trust himself to answer.

During that thirty miles' drive Kendall Curtis sat suffering an almost unbearable torture of mind. Here, within an arm's-length, was the woman who should now be his wife. She whom he had so dearly loved. She was near him; yet they were as far apart as if the grave was in truth between them.

He found some consolation in the fact that she was still Miss Fenton. "Why was that?" he wondered. "Had Dixon not married her?" Then he reflected that, as she had married Horace Wakeman, she could hardly marry another, unless the first marriage had been annulled. He was sorely puzzled. Everything appeared to be in a state of tangle. One point he was clear upon. He must leave Boomelana. He had played his part in the drama. His final exit had been made. A re-appearance was impossible.

The trying journey ended at last. Ken lost no time in putting the buggy away and tending the horses. Then he caught and saddled Borealis, and, giving him his head, let the horse bear him where it would, trying not to think, but thinking, thinking all the time. It was dark ere he got back to his hut, and, making up the fire, boiled the billy—"For the last time," he told himself, "as, to-morrow, he would leave Boomelana far behind."

As he supped his black tea, the door was pushed open, and Durward Seton entered.

"Where have you been?" he demanded, angrily. "I can't make you out at all. Why did you clear out, when I asked you to come in to dinner?"

"I am sorry——" began Ken.

"What will become of you, if you go on like this?" continued Seton, in a kinder tone. "You neglect your personal appearance; you want to hide at the approach of a fellow-being; you——"

"I will leave Boomelana to-morrow, and——" interrupted Ken.

"No, you won't!" cried the squatter. "Let it drop for the present. I'll make you a man again, in spite of yourself. I speak for my own sake, as well as yours, Harry; for it's a mate I want here—not a servant."

Curtis hardly knew what to say to this man, who, he could see, was trying to help him up.

Seton, having recovered his good humour, seated himself, and lit his pipe, as if in no hurry to go.

"What do you think of my selection for a companion for Miss Seton?" he asked, with a smile.

"Not quite what she expected, I think," said Ken, uneasily.

"No," laughed the other; "but she'll get over it. Do you know who that young lady is, Harry?"

"You said she was a Miss Fenton, I think."

"Yes; but I did not tell you that she was the Vera Fenton whose name figured in the papers rather sensationally a few months back."

"You did not," said Ken, moving back from the fire, so that his face was in the shadow."

"It's a fact. Poor girl! she's had a rough time one way and another. Perhaps I may be doing wrong in telling you her story; but she has nothing to reproach herself with, and would not mind, I'm sure."

Ken said nothing. His hands trembled as he held his pipe to his lips. His heart was beating quickly; but he was glad. He was about to hear his own story from his loved one's point of view; and, maybe, some light would be thrown on things that he had not understood.

"I've known Vera a good while," went on Seton. "Ten years ago she was quite a kiddie, and we were

great mates whenever I went to Sydney. Her father trained horses for me, both before and after my marriage; but when my great trouble came, I left the racing world, and, of late years, I saw nothing of the Fentons. I read of the remarkable series of troubles that overtook them after that, as, I suppose, you did; but until I came across Vera in Melbourne the other day, I did not know the real truth."

"I read a little about it; not much," said Ken, trying to appear unconcerned. "Has Miss Fenton been living in Melbourne since?"

"I had business down there with Clarkson and Hunt, the stock and station agents," continued Seton, "and was surprised to see, seated at a typewriter in their office, Vera Fenton. I knew her at once; for, though pale and troubled-looking, she had lost but little of her girlish beauty. I had heard of her leaving Sydney with the bookmaker who had dragged her father down, and had thought her conduct unworthy and rather shameless; but, when she looked at me with the same old frank, honest, unwavering look in her eyes, I knew that she had done nothing to make her hang her head. I felt that I had wronged her in thought, and sought an interview with her, wishing to help her if I could. She was glad to see me again, took me into her confidence, as she used to in the old days, and told me her strange story."

Seton paused to relight his pipe, and then went on again.

"The trouble started when Roger Fenton went to the wall, robbed and disgraced by the scoundrelly bookmaker, Dixon. Vera was engaged to a fellow named Kendall Curtis. They appeared to love one another dearly. I cannot speak of Curtis, but the girl's love

was genuine enough. She loved him then; she never ceased to love him; and now says she will remain true to him, though he is dead and done with. Eh! What! Did you speak?"

A sound like a stifled moan had come from out the shadows where Curtis sat, with his teeth clenched on the stem of his unlit pipe.

"No," said Ken. "Something made me cough. Go on, please."

"The lovers thought to improve things by getting married. On the fatal day Curtis disappeared, together with a large sum of his employers' money. Naturally, people believe that man and money went together. The girl does not. She loved him, and swears that he was no thief——"

"And still she allowed another to take his place!" cried Ken.

"She was hardly responsible. She waited and waited, but no bridegroom came. The other, a man who had also tried to win her, was by her side. He was a man of strong will-power, and she admits he had some strange influence over her. She was wrought up to a state of hysteria by the long wait; and, when it became evident that her lover had deserted her, Horace Wakeman worked his baneful influence over her for all it was worth. As one in a trance, she allowed him to lead her to the altar. The ceremony was proceeded with; but ere it was completed she awoke to her position. Tearing the ring from her finger, she cast it from her, declaring that she would not be Wakeman's wife—and she never was."

"Is that true?" gasped Curtis. "I did not know—I thought——"

Not noticing the other's agitation, Durward Seton continued :

"She was never his wife. They got her away from the church, and from that scoundrel. Many times he tried to force himself upon her, and claim her, only to be repulsed. At last, maddened by defeat, that man struck down Roger Fenton, and so lost for himself all chance of gaining his desire. With the exit of Horace Wakeman, another suitor appeared—Doods Dixon. He took possession of Fenton's home by right of a mortgage that he held. He offered to barter it back to Vera in exchange for herself. She, of course, refused. He continued to urge her, always with the same result. At last he came to her with news of her missing lover, Curtis. He had seen the man in Melbourne, and he made her an offer. Let her accept him, and he would help Curtis to get clear away; refuse, and the absconder would be arrested forthwith.

"She agreed to give him an answer the following day; but, seized with a mad idea of finding and warning Curtis, she left that night for Melbourne, telling no one. Her luck was out. Dixon saw her by accident, and went by the same train. With diabolical intent, he wired her friends that she was with him, and so damaged her good name. On the journey, and in Melbourne, he tried in vain to force her to comply with his wishes. Her search for Curtis was futile, and Dixon almost succeeded in dishonouring her by a forced marriage. She escaped in time, and fled. In her wanderings that night she was, by some good fortune, guided to one who proved a friend in need—a humble owner of a coffee stall. This good fellow took her to his home. It proved, by some strange fate, to be the very place where her lover, Kendall Curtis, was

living. She was fated to be in at the death, as it were. At the very moment of their arrival, Curtis was in the grip of the police, brought there by that hound, Dixon, who thus sought to hurt the girl who had escaped him. She rushed in, and called to her lover. Dixon came to her side, and Curtis seemed mad with anger at the sight. He tore himself free, and shot Doods Dixon, and was dragged away at last, cursing the woman that loved him. She never saw him again."

Seton paused. The hut was in semi-darkness, lighted only by the dying fire. In the murk crouched the listening boundary rider, dimly visible; but, as Seton looked, he saw that the man's head was buried in his hands, and that he was sobbing.

The squatter rose, and stepped towards him.

"Why, Harry!" he exclaimed, in surprise.

Curtis rose also. Throwing out his arms, he cried:

"Thank God, you have told me this! Oh! how I have wronged her! But I was so much in the dark. I——"

"What do you mean, man? Who are you?"

"I am Kendall Curtis!"

CHAPTER XXV.

CURTIS CONFIDES IN DURWARD SETON.

"**K**ENDALL CURTIS ! You ! Impossible !" cried Seton, in amazement. "The man is dead !"

"No, that is a mistake. I am, indeed, he !" said Ken.

"I cannot credit it !" said the squatter. "You, that cowardly——"

"Stay !" exclaimed Curtis. "Do not condemn me unheard ! I will tell you my story ; then judge me as you will."

"Go on !" cried Seton, harshly. "I hope you can convince me, for I had judged you to be a man."

"I had intended that my secret would never be told," said Curtis ; "but you have learnt it, so I will tell you all, though you may——"

"You have nothing to fear from me !" cried Seton. "For that poor girl's sake, however undeserving you might be, I will be silent."

To no other man had Curtis told the story of his undoing ; and he felt a great relief in at last unburdening his mind. He told of the whole wretched business from its commencement on that day, now six months ago, when he was forcibly prevented from becoming the husband of the girl he loved.

Durward Seton, at first scornful and unbelieving, began to have faith in this man as the strange story was unfolded.

"But why, in heaven's name," he broke out, impatiently, "did you not return and assert your innocence? Was it cowardice, or——"

"Would to God, I had!" cried Ken. "And I meant to do so as soon as I got to Melbourne, but when I read that my intended bride had given herself to another, without hesitation, all the heart seemed to go out of me. I had lost her. What mattered anything else? I determined never to face Sdyney again of my own free will, to be held up to the scorn and derision of Horace Wakeman and his friends. I was wrong in so deciding—terribly wrong. What an amount of suffering would have been avoided had I acted differently! No wonder you term me a coward!"

"I am beginning to understand better," said Seton, kindly. "Go ahead, boy; there's more to tell yet."

Ken went on, and narrated every event up to the time of his arrest. Then he thrilled his companion with a graphic description of his battle for life in the flood, and his rescue by the aid of gallant Borealis.

"And the detective!" cried Seton. "Is it true that——"

"He was murdered! But that crime is not on my conscience," said Ken, "though the name of Kendall Curtis bears the stigma. Dixon was the murderer. I saw the deed, but I was powerless to prevent it."

At last the long story was ended. Curtis stood before his employer, waiting his judgment.

"I am in your hands," he said. "What are you going to do?"

Durward Seton rose, and placed a hand on the younger man's shoulder.

"Harry," he said, "your story is almost beyond credence, but I believe you. I believe you to be an innocent man."

"Thank you," said Ken, simply; and their hands met in the darkness.

"If I can, I will help you prove your innocence, and restore you to your proper place amongst men."

"Thank you," said Ken again. "I am glad to have lived to have gained such friendship; but it cannot be. Better for all that I should remain in obscurity. I cannot prove——"

"Tut, tut, man! You make me angry!" cried Seton. "Are you not innocent? Don't continue to play a coward's part. Be a man. Come out boldly and face your enemies."

"I am no coward, sir; but——"

"Listen," interrupted Seton. "You are not so friendless as you imagine. That Jerry Gleeson, whom you thought a Judas, though believing you dead, has been working to clear your name. He believes in you. There is another also—Duncan, I think Vera said—who is doing all he can. Gleeson knows the man that put you on the steamer, where he met you. They are trying to find the fellow, in the hope of clearing up the mystery. In justice to these people you must give up this running away idea."

"I did not know I had such friends," said Curtis. "I have been blind. How ever can I show my gratitude? What would you have me do? Proclaim my identity to the world, and——"

"Not yet," cried Seton. "We must be cautious. For the present, remain Harry Gordon; but when the

time comes you must come forward boldly and fight. I am going to help your friends, Gleeson and Duncan. If money is required, I have plenty. I want to see that little girl yonder happy again. I want to save you from sinking further into the depths, and I want to see the scoundrels who ruined and murdered poor old Roger Fenton meet their deserts."

"You have put new life into me," said Curtis. "The knowledge that Vera has been true to me, and that I am not the friendless outcast that I had thought myself, brings back my manhood. I will yet prove worthy of her love and your friendship."

"I am sure of it, boy!" cried the squatter. And once more their hands met in a firm clasp.

"I cannot remain here, though," continued Ken. "I could not bear it. To see Vera daily, and not dare to speak what my heart is bursting to say, would be maddening. I would betray myself. Until my innocence is proved I must remain dead to her."

"Perhaps you are right," said Seton. "I will think of a plan, and talk of it to-morrow. But what of the horse? Are you sure there is no mistake?"

"None," answered Ken. "Borealis, as I have named him, is the Zalinski—Aurora colt, without doubt."

"He's too valuable to be knocked about as he has been," said Seton. "I'll tell you what we'll do: we'll get the colt into training at once. Borealis shall share in your triumphant resurrection."

CHAPTER XXVI.

DIXON IS WORRIED.

DURING the months that had passed since his eventful return from the Caulfield Cup meeting Doods Dixon had taken things quietly. He kept aloof from his fellow-bookmakers, and was voted by them unsociable, boorish, and an altogether objectionable member of their association. Many noticed a great change in his manner and appearance. When he first came amongst them he had adopted a noisy, almost boisterous method. Good temper and geniality seemed to be natural to him, and he became something of a favourite in the ring. Now all had changed. He was morose, irritable, and generally "nasty." He had also lost his former appearance of robust health. Now he was thin, pale, and weak looking, and the opinion was often expressed that "the erstwhile cheerful Silver King of the flat was 'breaking up.'"

There was ample justification for this conviction; but the reason was not evident. No one knew that Dixon was now a slave to the morphine habit: that on his arm an ever-increasing number of dark spots showed where the deadly drug had been injected, and but for this, together with an extraordinary strength of will, he must falter and quit the game.

Just now he was losing money steadily. Somehow things would not go right for him; but he kept on betting, trusting that the luck would change. His great hope was Momus. The disqualification had been lifted, and the horse was in training. Dixon intended

going for a big win. The Epsom Mile, which Momus should have won the previous year for Roger Fenton, was to be his mission. By fair means or foul, Dixon meant to win it. Then, his fortune assured, the great desire of his life must be gratified.

Vera Fenton would be his. He would defy any earthly power to take her from him when they next came together. He could wait a little longer. The girl was safe in Melbourne, her every move watched by a man in his pay. When he was ready, she would prove an easy victim.

This is what he told himself night and day; but something presently occurred that threw him into a state of apprehension and anger.

A letter came from the watcher in Melbourne. It was brief, but explicit :

"Girl left Melbourne. Present address, Boomelana Station, N.S.W. Governess, housekeeper, or something, to squatter. What's my next move?"

That was all; but it conveyed a lot to Dixon. He knew that the owner of Boomelana was Durward Seton, an interesting widower, and saw danger in Vera Fenton being brought into contact with the man. He would be sure to admire the girl. Admiration would ripen into love; then——

The very thought threw him into a paroxysm of jealousy.

"It must not—shall not be !" he repeated many times. "No man will take her from me, and live !"

He resolved to get Vera away from Boomelana; but how? He set to work to think out a plan of action. The squatter's movements must be ascertained. He would, no doubt, be away at times. A couple of men in hiding. A motor car ready——"

With a half-formed idea in his mind, Dixon walked the city streets one Monday, working out the details of a daring plan.

"Whom can I depend on to undertake the job?" he muttered. "I can trust no one. Ah! I have it! Yes, that will do. No one will suspect that I and——"

He looked about, fancying that he had been speaking aloud; then continued his way, still muttering.

"Now, to find out if Seton is at Boomelana or not," he thought, as his plan took definite shape.

That question was decided quickly. As he turned into Martin Place he noticed three men talking together. To his surprise, the man he was thinking about was one of them. The others were Jerry Gleeson and Fred Duncan.

The sight added to his uneasiness. What had brought Durward Seton into the company of those men, whom, he knew, were trying to connect him with the Curtis affair. He guessed that they had found a new ally, sent, perhaps, by Vera Fenton. Well, if it was to be a fight, he would give Seton something to fight for. The coast was clear at Boomelana. He would act at once. Vera must be got away. Then let them to do their worst.

He walked right on past the group, conscious that he was an object of keen interest to Seton by the way the squatter stared at him as he went by. Into the telegraph office he hurried, and wrote a message to his spy, in Melbourne. Its words conveyed no meaning to the telegraph operators; but the man who received it would decipher it to read:

"Hire motor and driver to go by train Wagga, arrive Wednesday; meet gent there. Spare no expense."

And he would act accordingly.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HORACE WAKEMAN.

DURWARD SETON decided that Ken had better leave Boomelana, as the presence of Vera Fenton agitated him so greatly. Borealis was given as the reason for his departure.

"The horse must be entrusted to a good trainer to look after," said Seton to his sister and Vera; "so Gordon is off to see about it."

Curtis lost no time in getting away. He carried with him a letter from Seton to Muir McDonald, a trainer at Wagga, into whose care he was to entrust Borealis. Also a note of introduction to one Theo. Lawson, a friend of the squatter, who would find him employment at his stock sale yards. Ken was to content himself there for the present, and wait developments.

"I will go to Sydney as soon as I get someone to manage this place for me," said Seton; "confer with your friends, and get to work. Never fear, boy, we'll succeed, and quickly, too."

In accordance with his friend's plan, Curtis left the station, and journeyed to Wagga. The trip was uneventful, and, having arrived at the riverside town, Ken sought out Muir McDonald, and delivered the squatter's letter.

The trainer, an elderly Scotchman, read the note carefully, and just as carefully eyed horse and rider.

"Umph!" he said at last. "Not a bad-lookin' cove. D'ye ken his breedin', young man?"

"Well—er—I'm not too clear on that point," said Ken, uneasily. "No doubt, Mr. Seton will tell you later."

"Very well, young man; I'll tak th' horse, because o' th' man that asks me. Durward Seton is honest an' straight-dealin'; but there's so many crooked uns messin' aboot wi' horses that a man has to be carefu', laddie. Leave th' horse wi' me. If he can gallop, I'll soon ken."

Curtis left Borealis with the trainer, and made his way to Lawson's yards. The stock salesman asked no questions.

"I'll fix you up," he said; "start when you're ready."

Next day Ken found himself mounted, helping to drive a mob of cattle to be trucked at the railway yards, and so well did he ride that no one seemed to notice that he was not of the bush.

He soon settled down to his new duties, and did not fear recognition. His fellow-workers knew him as Harry Gordon, and did not bother further about who he was, or what he had been. Muir McDonald kept him posted with regard to Borealis. The colt had surprised the veteran trainer, who prophesied great things from it in the near future.

A rush of work kept Ken from dwelling too much on his troubles, but his heart was at Boomelana, and his thoughts ever of Vera. Seton was in Sydney on his behalf, but, as yet, no word had come from him; so Ken had to possess his soul in patience.

One afternoon, while at the railway station on business, a train arrived from Melbourne.

In a truck at the rear of the train was a large motor car, and much interest was taken in the landing of the auto. After some trouble, it was safely placed on the ground, and Ken drew close to glance at the new arrival. It was a powerful car, equipped with spare tyres, great polished lamps, and stores, as for a hard journey. As the crowd were critically examining the—to many there—strange conveyance, a young man in the attire of a chauffeur arrived and took possession of it. In a few moments he had the motor working, and drove slowly out of the yard, followed by an admiring crowd. Outside he was joined by a man, also dressed in a motoring costume. A huge, ill-fitting overcoat enveloped his body, and a cap several sizes too large covered his head, and came well over his eyes, which were protected by enormous goggles, while the lower part of his face was hidden by the huge collar of his coat. After a few words with the chauffeur, he entered the car and was driven rapidly away.

Ken mounted his horse, and rode slowly down the street. He was joined by one of his mates, who remarked: "Comical rig those coves sport, ain't it?"

"Yes; rather queer," said Ken. "I wonder who they are?"

"Dunno," replied the other. "Cove in th' coat's bin at th' Royal since yisterd'y, waitin' fer th' car. They say he must er slept in them togs. 'E ain't even took them goggles orf since 'e come. They're goin' up your way, I hear."

"Where?"

"Boomelana. Th' comical cove's bin askin' about th' roads, an' th' nearest way ter git ter th' homestead."

"Strange !" said Ken. "If they are friends of Mr. Seton they'd know he was not at home. I don't think they are going there."

"That's what Lil up at th' Royal told me, anyhow, an' she knows what's doin' generally," remarked the man, as he cantered away.

What the man had said troubled Ken greatly. Anything concerning Boomelana was of interest to him now that it sheltered Vera.

He began to think that the visit of this mysterious man in the motor meant further trouble for her. The more he thought the greater became his conviction that it was so. Who was this stranger who kept himself muffled up in the disguise of an uncomfortable costume? Surely he had a reason for doing so. Evidently he wished to hide his identity. That alone was suspicious.

Ken performed his duties in a very absent-minded way that day. His thoughts were with the strange car speeding up the hills to Boomelana, where his beloved was, with no one to protect her. He felt certain that some enemy had discovered her whereabouts, and the desire was strong within him to hasten to her assistance in the impending danger. His anxiety became so acute at last that he determined to risk the displeasure of his present employer, as well as Durward Seton, by setting out for the station that afternoon.

Accordingly, he saddled the horse he rode at his work. Then, going to his room, he scribbled a brief note to explain his absence. Slipping a revolver into his pocket, he mounted the waiting horse, and, giving him his head, cantered away along the Tumber road, which led to Boomelana.

Darkness was upon the bush by the time he had cast twenty miles behind him. The road was unsuitable for night travelling, being so rough that little progress could be made. Ken had at length to draw rein and camp for the night. So, tethering his horse, he lit a fire by the roadside. Crouching over the burning sticks, he sat ready for anything that the night might bring; but nothing happened. Darkness at last gave way to the coming day. Then Ken pushed on once more.

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Vera Fenton was enjoying a morning ramble with the children, some distance from the homestead, when a sound familiar enough to her in the city, but new to these bush-clad hills, broke the silence. It was the noisy buzz of an oil motor. The children knew the sound also, and ran forward to discover its whereabouts. They had not far to search. Drawn up near a clump of bushes stood a large motor car. A man in the garb of a chauffeur was doing something to the engine, which was uncovered. Hearing the approach of Vera and her companions, he replaced the cover, and tooted the horn three times. Turning, he raised his cap to Vera.

"Good morning," he said, pleasantly. "Is this what they call Boomelana?"

"Yes," answered Vera. "The homestead is a little further on; but Mr. Seton is away."

"Well, I ain't sorry," said the man. "We missed the place yesterday; went Lord knows how many miles along the wrong road. Last night we got bushed, and had to camp out. I ain't taking on any more of these excursions."

Vera was about to ask the man a question, when she was startled to feel an arm thrown about her neck from behind. She heard the children scream, but before she herself could utter a cry, a handkerchief was pressed against her mouth. In a moment she was raised, struggling, in the arms of a grotesquely-attired man. She fought desperately, and succeeded in tearing the cloth from her mouth and throwing it away; but she had been weakened by the drug that it contained. The man, seizing his advantage, threw her forcibly into the car, and sprang in after her.

"Quick !" he gasped ; "let her have it. Those kids 'll raise a hue and cry, and we'll have a crowd after us."

The car sprang forward in obedience to the driver's touch, and dashed away at a great speed. Vera screamed for help, but the echo in the hills was the only reply.

"Curse you ! stop that noise !" cried the stranger, fiercely, "or it will be worse for you." He held her down on the seat beside him, and strove to stifle her cries.

"Who are you ? What is the meaning of this outrage ?" gasped the frightened girl.

"You'll know later on, my dear," said the man hoarsely. "All you have to do now is to take things quietly, and no one will hurt you."

Recognising that screaming and struggling would avail her nothing at present, Vera remained quiet, trying to think what it all meant. She strove to penetrate the disguise of the man who sat beside her, but both his face and figure were effectually hidden by his motor costume. She thought of appealing to the man driving. He, however, was devoting all his attention to the management of the car, and seemed indifferent to what

was happening behind him. There was little hope in that direction. As she became calmer, she remembered that Durward Seton was coming home to-day. If the car kept to the main road, it must pass the coach by which he was travelling. Surely she would be able to attract his attention, and he would save her.

Suddenly her companion gripped her tighter, and forced her down, with his hand pressed over her mouth. The sound of water splashing told Vera that they were fording Cuneen's Crossing. She struggled gamely, but the man was her master. It was not till they were out of earshot of the hotel, and passing through a rough cutting in the hill, known as Conroy's Gap, that he partially freed her. Though indignant at the treatment she was receiving, Vera allowed no word to pass her lips, but vowed that she would die before this man conquered her. Now they came to a place where the road wound round the side of the hill. Beneath them lay a deep gorge, and if by any means a vehicle was to leave the road at this point, nothing could save it from destruction, or its occupants from death.

The track was rough and narrow, there being barely room for two vehicles to pass. Jack Foster, the chauffeur, being a careful driver, slowed down as he rounded a bend, thinking that some conveyance might be approaching. He was not altogether wrong; for, as the car swept round the turn, it met, not a vehicle, but a horseman, cantering smartly towards it. When the man saw the oncoming auto, he deliberately urged his horse right in front of it, waving a hand as if to stop it. At the same moment Vera, in spite of her captor's threats, and attempts to prevent her, screamed loudly for help.



"HORACE WAKEMAN, MY FATHER'S MURDERER!"

A Rogue's Luck.

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"Curse you !" growled the man, angrily. "I should have gagged and bound you !" To Foster he cried : "Run into him ! Run the d—— fool down ! Kill him if he does not shift !"

Foster swerved the car to one side, but still the horse-man blocked the way. Pulling a revolver from his pocket, he shouted : "Stop !"

Jack Foster, who was a city youth, felt certain that this was a bushranger, and, not caring to be made the receptacle of a bullet, stopped on the instant.

"Now, get out of the car !" commanded the stranger, and again Foster obeyed.

"What is the meaning of this conduct ?" cried the other man, fiercely. "What is it you want ?"

"You are forcing that lady to go with you against her will," said Kendall Curtis. "She cried out for help. Let her go."

"It's a lie !" returned the other. "This lady is——"

With a sudden movement Vera wrenched herself free, and sprang out on to the road. Running towards Ken, she called, "Help me, Mr. Gordon ! This man has carried me off by force from Boomelana !"

The man followed, and sought to seize her. Curtis urged his horse between them, riding the angry man down, who stumbled on to his knees. As he did so, his cap and motor goggles fell off, revealing his face.

With an involuntary exclamation of surprise, Ken threw his horse back on its haunches. A cry of terror issued from Vera Fenton, as she shrank further from the now undisguised man.

"Seize him !" she gasped. "Horace Wakeman, my father's murderer !"

Ken sprang from his startled horse, but his surprise had been so great that he was slow to act. Not so

Wakeman. Though but the ghost of his former self, he was quick in his movements, and alive to his danger. With one bound he was in the car, and had the motor in motion in a moment. Grasping the steering wheel, he bent forward, and the big automobile dashed away at a terrific speed down the hillside.

Curtis gazed after the flying auto with curses on his lips. To follow would be useless. He could not hope to catch that rushing motor.

"He'll break his neck for a cert !" cried the discomfited driver.

Ken turned on the fellow, angrily: "And I'll break yours !" he exclaimed, "if you do not satisfactorily explain your part in this business." Then he turned to Vera. Thank God, you are unharmed," he murmured. "I should have seized the scoundrel, but——"

"Sooner or later his sin will find him out," said Vera; "so do not worry, Mr. Gordon. I wonder what good angel sent you to my assistance. You have rendered me a service that——"

"Say no more, please," said Ken, uneasily. "I was going to see Mr. Seton, when——"

"But you must know that he is away. He is due back by to-day's coach, you know," exclaimed Vera.

Curtis was confused, and, adopting a brusque manner to hide his real feelings, made Vera mount his horse, and, followed by the two men, she led the way back to Cuneen's Crossing, along the road she had just traversed so rapidly.

The arrival of the vehicle called by courtesy a coach was the one thing that kept the denizens of Cuneen's Crossing and its environs in touch with the outside world. Its advent invariably brightened the dulness,

and, for the time being, lent an air of importance to the sleepy settlement.

To-day its appearance evoked exclamations of surprise, for trailing behind it was a large motor car.

Curtis, who, with Vera and the chaffeur, had reached the hotel before the coach, was amazed at the re-appearance of the car. He concluded that Wakeman was on the coach, and steeled himself for another meeting with his enemy. Horace Wakeman was not there, however. The car had been found deserted by the roadside, containing only the costume he had worn, but the man had not been seen.

Durward Seton and another man were the only passengers. The squatter showed great surprise at the presence of Ken and Vera; but before he could speak the girl drew him on one side, and in a low voice quickly told of her exciting experience.

Seton's face showed plainly as he listened how surprised and shocked he was at the recital.

Meanwhile, Foster closely watched by Curtis, was examining the motor car. He found it in good order, ready for action.

"Get in !" commanded Ken, as he himself took a seat in the car. "I must lose no time in tracking down that scoundrel !" he cried to Seton. "Miss Fenton will be safe with you, sir. I will explain my actions when next I see you."

"Stay !" cried the squatter. "We will go, too."

Helping Vera into the vehicle, Seton seated himself beside her. A word to the driver, and the auto whizzed away towards Wagga.

Arrived in the town, Seton had the car taken to the police station. Soon the authorities were in possession

of the facts of the sensational occurrence, and the country was being scoured for the long-sought murderer of Roger Fenton.

Ere the day closed Vera was destined to receive one more shock to her already overwrought nerves. As she proceeded to the Royal Hotel with Durward Seton a man brushed past, evidently hurrying to catch the Sydney train. Vera gasped, and gripped her companion's arm. Seton looked, and saw what had agitated her. 'The man was Doods Dixon !

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BOREALIS FIT AND WELL.

STANLEY STIRLING, a young and smart detective, was sent up from Sydney on the Wakeman case. He found the local police active; but they had practically nothing to work on.

The detective's aid was very welcome; but even with the addition of that expert's advice, Horace Wakeman was not secured.

From the spot where the car had been picked up by the coach, the ground was examined in all directions by trackers, but the fugitive had left no trace. The description of Horace Wakeman was known to Stirling and the police—that is, his description at the time of the Fenton murder. What manner of man this was that had fled from the motor car, or how he was attired, no one knew. His travelling costume had been discarded, and he had been careful not to allow himself to be seen in his ordinary clothes during his stay in Wagga, *en route* to Boomelana.

Stirling put in a fortnight of hard, resultless work; then, reluctantly acknowledging defeat, returned, crest-fallen and disappointed, to the city. Before he went Durward Seton had a long talk with him. He enlightened the detective with regard to Vera Fenton's trip to Melbourne and her real relations with Doods

Dixon. Told him of his suspicion that the bookmaker was concerned in this latest attack upon the girl, and advised that he should be closely watched.

Detective Stirling was not convinced that there was much in Seton's theory, but agreed that Dixon was worth keeping under surveillance.

The elderly gentleman who had alighted from the coach at Cuneen's Crossing with Durward Seton, on the day of the motor car episode, was to manage Boomelana while its owner was otherwise engaged. He was duly installed, but Seton did not at once return to the city, as he had intended doing. The Boomelana household had been so upset by what had occurred that he deemed it advisable to stay at home till the nerves of the women folk had regained their normal state, and the re-appearance of Wakeman was no longer feared.

He spent many days in Wagga, interesting himself in the training of Borealis. Muir McDonald had worked wonders with the Zalinski colt, both the trainer and Durward Seton agreeing that he was one of the best they had had to do with. Soon after he came into McDonald's charge, the trainer had advised Ken to enter him for the principal event at the meeting of the Murrumbidgee Turf Club. This had been done, the colt figuring as the property of Harry Gordon. If he shaped up to expectations, he was to be nominated for the big events at the A.J.C. Spring Meeting.

The date of the local fixture was now close at hand. McDonald was giving Borealis his final gallops, and declared the horse in splendid trim. Although a more lengthy preparation would have enhanced his prospects, the trainer was confident that his condition on the day of the race would be good enough to enable Borealis to carry off the River Cup triumphantly.

For the time being Durward Seton allowed turf matters to occupy his mind to the exclusion of Kendall Curtis's guilt or innocence. To Ken he counselled patience, when he showed an inclination to chafe under his ordeal.

"Don't worry, boy," said the squatter. "Things will look up presently. Buck up, and be as cheerful as you can. Our object is the undoing of Doods Dixon, for he is our chief enemy. If we can give him a severe set back our chance of getting the truth out of him will be improved. I hope, with Borealis, to give him a rude shock. Jerry Gleeson's discoveries go to show that Dixon intends to bring off a big *coup* at Randwick with Momus. He is preparing to stake his all on that horse in the Epsom, as did poor Roger Fenton last year. It will be but retributive justice if Borealis, carrying the Fenton colours, upsets his plans, and avenges the man he ruined, and the girl he sought to dishonour."

"You think that Borealis can win the Epsom, then?" exclaimed Ken.

"Yes. Why not?" continued Seton. "We must make a big effort towards that end, anyway. McDonald considers the colt class enough for higher honours still, so the idea is reasonable enough. The horse will be entered for the Epsom and Metrop., and in Vera Fenton's name."

"Then the identity of the colt is to be made public?" cried Ken. "Where do I come in? What if——"

"Leave everything to those who are acting in your interests, Harry. We will see you through," went on the squatter. "The identity of Borealis will be established, as that of Harry Gordon will be shortly after, I hope. You have less to fear now than you had a little time back."

Ken had to be satisfied with this. He was entirely in Seton's hands, and dare not do anything on his own initiative, for fear of betraying himself. He decided to try and possess his soul in patience for a little while longer, though unable to take the cheerful view of the situation that Durward Seton seemed to.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SOME SURPRISES.

THE day on which the meeting of the Murrumbidgee Turf Club was to be held arrived in due course. The weather conditions were fine, if wintry, and the historic town of Wagga Wagga was *en fête*. Seasons had been good, money was plentiful, and the sport-loving folks of the neighbourhood journeyed to the race meeting in goodly numbers. All the accommodation in the town was monopolised the day before, late-comers having to be content with rude and crowded sleeping quarters. No one seemed to consider that a hardship, cheerfulness being the rule with all.

Bookmakers and other turfites came from Melbourne and Sydney, as well as from other places far removed from the scene of operations. With the Sydney contingent came a party invited by Durward Seton. Its members, after doing the races, were to proceed to Boomelana and partake of the hospitality of the homestead in the hills.

Vera Fenton, with Miss Seton and the children, were down for the races, and they accompanied Durward Seton to the railway station to meet the party from Sydney. Ken was present; he knew who was to arrive, and was curious to see if any of them would take a second look at him.

Jerry Gleeson, Fred Duncan, Lena Walton, and her mother comprised the party. Not one of them took the slightest notice of the bronze-bearded, rough-looking fellow standing near. Ken was satisfied that he was safe from recognition; but his heart sank, and he turned away with a sigh as he realised what a forlorn outcast he was.

Seton noticed his dejected appearance, and came after him.

"Cheer up, old man," he whispered. "There's not one amongst them but would rush to your side and grasp your hand, did they but know. It won't be long now till they will be free to do so."

The train from the south also claimed Durward Seton's attention. He had an old friend coming from Melbourne at his earnest request. This was none other than Grif Thornleigh, the Caulfield trainer, who came, curious to know why Seton was anxious for his presence at the meeting.

The up-to-date course, with its first-class stand and enclosure, presented an animated appearance when the bell rang for the first race. A record crowd was present. Youth, beauty, age, and homeliness joined in supporting the most popular Australian sport. On all sides evidences of prosperity were to be seen, with no signs of the lean years of drought and distress to cast a shadow o'er the pleasure of the moment.

Betting was brisk, but the task of selecting winners was no easy one, for the fields were large, and the competing horses above the average in quality.

With the preliminary events the Seton party, concerned themselves but little. Their interest was centred in the River Cup, and the wonderful Borealis, who, Durward Seton declared, was sure to win.

Jerry Gleeson and Fred Duncan backed the colt early, getting eight to one for their money, as Borealis was not the favourite. That honour was held by Wallabi, a well-known and brilliant performer from Tabletop. Kendall Curtis, who had invested most of his savings on Borealis some days previously, did not mingle with the crowd, but spent most of his time with the horse that in reality was his own. The colt seemed quite pleased to have his old master in the stall with him, and if Ken made to leave, neighed to bring him back.

While with the colt, Durward Seton and Grif Thornleigh approached, accompanied by the squatter's sister and Vera Fenton. Thornleigh had received one surprise on being presented to Vera; he was now about to experience another. There was no escape for Ken, so he did not leave the stall.

"I want you to tell me what you think of this colt, Thornleigh," exclaimed Seton. "Bring him out, please, Harry."

Ken led Borealis into the open, and removed his rug. The Caulfield trainer's eyes opened wide in amazement as he looked.

"D—— it, Seton!" he cried at last; "do you know what horse this is?"

"Do you?" asked the squatter, smilingly.

"Do I! What th' deuce is th'——"

He hurriedly glanced at his race book. "Mr. Gordon's bay horse, Borealis! Who th' devil is Gordon? This horse belongs to Miss Fenton!"

"Hush! Not so loud, please," said Seton. "It was to make sure of that that I brought you here. You'll notice he is entered as by Zalinski—Aurora, so we were making no mistake."

"But how did you find it out? Where did the horse spring from? I never dreamt he was alive!"

Vera looked on in wonderment, scarcely understanding the drift of the conversation.

"Gordon came into possession of the colt the day following the railway accident," said Seton, "in a way he has satisfactorily explained to me. Eventually he arrived at Boomelana, and, in discussing the horse, the truth dawned upon us. Curiously enough, Miss Fenton came to my place also. Harry wanted to hand over Borealis, but there were reasons for keeping our discovery to ourselves. I decided to hold the horse in trust for Miss Fenton. Satisfied though I was of the horse's identity, I considered it as well for you to see him; now I know we were not mistaken."

"It's a strange thing," said Thornleigh. "I'm glad he's all right, anyhow. I whipped the cat enough over letting that Dixon take him away. If he had been left with me, I'd have won a good race with him before this. I congratulate you, Miss Fenton; your luck is in, I reckon."

Vera was stroking Borealis's nose lovingly.

"My very own!" she cried. "I can scarcely credit it, though I noticed a resemblance to poor old Aurora when first I saw him, did I not, Mr. Gordon?"

"Yes," answered Harry, lowering his eyes.

"Mr. Gordon is always doing me a service. I do not know, however, how I can repay him," continued Vera. And Ken looked as if he would like the earth to open and swallow him up.

"What a sensation for the newspapers!" cried Thornleigh.

"We must not make it too public," said Seton. "Let them discover it when they see Borealis entered in

Vera's name for the A.J.C. meeting. How we got the colt must remain a secret yet awhile."

"I'm as close as the proverbial oyster," remarked the Melbourne trainer. "Mum's th' word. Here comes old Mac to saddle up. I'm off to get another tenner on. It's the best of good things, Seton, old boy."

While the rest of their party were satisfied to remain in the grand-stand enclosure, Jerry Gleeson and Fred Duncan elected to do a tour of that portion of the course patronised by the rank and file. Jerry always had an eye to business. He had not given up hopes of discovering the whereabouts of Ginger Champley. Knowing the habits of the battling fraternity, he rightly considered a country race meeting a likely place to meet some of Champley's associates. As the breed of "flats" grows less in the cities, the "sharps" who prey on them are forced to travel far afield in search of plunder.

Many spielers known to Jerry were present. Monkey sweeps and Yankee sweat were being freely indulged in. The manipulator of the three walnut shells and the elusive pea was plying his calling industriously. His brethren of the three cards were also making bold bids for patronage.

Jerry moved about in the crowd, closely followed by Fred Duncan. Suddenly he paused, and an expression of joy illumined his hard face. Before him a man was bending over an opened umbrella, on which he was shuffling three small playing cards.

"I ain't th' best in th' world, but I ain't too slow!" cried the monte man. "This is th' one y've got ter find; these two yer get nothing at all. Now, I'll go five, ten, er a quid nobody knows it. Who knows th' red card fer er dollar? Well, n'rans ver wasn't look-

ing. I'll do it over again. Watch me close. It's th' red card yer got ter find if yer want ter beat me. Now, there's er easy one. Who knows it fer any part of er quid?"

"I know it, Mister," said Jerry, mildly.

"Well, stake yer money," cried the sharper, eagerly, while his buttoners pressed forward in anticipation. "How much? I'll go er quid yer wrong; put up yer money."

"A dollar," said Jerry, grinning. The card trickster's eyes met Gleeson's, and opened wide, as also did his mouth. He drew back his hand.

"Strike me stiff, Jerry!" he gasped, "what's yer game? I thought I'd caught a mug. Y're er dead nark!"

"How's things, Bluey?" asked Gleeson.

"Crook," answered the other; "no good at all. How's it with you?"

He closed his umbrella, and drew away from the crowd with Jerry.

"I can put you on to a dead cert fer th' Cup," said Gleeson. "Have er few quid on Borealis. I've come up from Sydney ter come at it."

"I'm stiff; ain't got er quid ter me name," growled the man. "It's no good ter me, Jerry."

Gleeson handed two sovereigns to his companion. "Put that on Borealis," he said. "Y'll get eights, p'raps more; an' come ter see me ter-night at th' Royal. It's particular business, Bluey, and it'll mean quids ter yer if yer act square. Will yer be there?"

"I'll come all right, Jerry," answered the other. "Eight o'clock sharp. Here's th' horses comin out; I'll have ter bustle ter get on."

Jerry and Fred hurried back to the paddock, the former chuckling as if the race was over, and he had won a hatful of sovereigns.

"Who's your friend?" asked Duncan. "You seem overjoyed at the meeting."

"I should grin!" cried Jerry. "So will you be when I let yer into th' know. My friend yonder is th' man we've been after fer months past—Ginger Champley!"

"Good business!" exclaimed Fred. "Our luck's in all right, Jerry. Hanged if I don't have another fiver on Borealis on the strength of it."

They joined Durward Seton and his party on the stand, as the horses were lined up at the barrier. Borealis was on the rails, next to Don, a fractious brute, that was plunging and rearing in all directions, thus delaying the start. The starter, seizing a favourable moment, released the webbing, but it only flew up on the outside. Borealis and the Don, getting their heads caught, lost several lengths. Nothing daunted, their riders set after the field, Borealis soon leaving Don. As the horses thundered past the stand Wallabi led, while Borealis was still at the rear. Once out of the straight, however, the son of Zalinski made a forward move. The way he dashed through his field at the back of the course was a revelation. Already his victory was loudly proclaimed, offers to bet odds on him being shouted by a score of throats. At the home turn he was at the head of affairs, and, coming on alone, scored a hollow victory, to the accompaniment of cheers from the Wagga townsmen, who were on him to a man.

Visitors from other districts were simply speechless with astonishment. Men gazed at their books, wondering, now that it was too late, where they had heard of a

Zalinski—Aurora colt before. Many, ever ready to impute dishonesty when they lose, swore that something was "crook," but all made a mental note to remember Borealis for future events.

The Boomelana party were, of course, highly pleased, and shook hands again and again, forgetting for the moment that one Harry Gordon was entitled to a share in their congratulations.

Vera was the first to remember. "Where's Mr. Gordon?" she cried. "I must go and tell him how glad——"

"I'll see him at once," said Durward Seton. "Don't you bother. He's rather shy, and averse to ladies' company, you know."

The squatter hurried away, Jerry Gleeson following, to whisper the welcome news he had about the longed-for Ginger Champley.

Seton was like a big, excited schoolboy. When he found Ken, he grasped his hand and wrung it heartily.

"This is a great day for us, boy!" he cried. "You've won the River Cup, and we've found the man who can prove your innocence; so put off that mournful look, and be happy."

And, when the big-hearted squatter left him, Ken felt happier than he had for months, and his heart was full of hope.

CHAPTER XXX.

CHAMPLEY MAKES A STATEMENT.

AS the reputed owner of the brilliant winner of the River Cup, Kendall Curtis found himself too much in the limelight for his comfort. He shirked as much as possible the congratulations and questions of a horde of would-be acquaintances; but from Durward Seton's party escape was impossible. He had to stand the trying ordeal of replying to expressions of joy at his success from the girl he loved, and men who were his dearest friends.

It was hard, indeed, to speak coldly, as if they were strangers, while he was longing to open his heart to them; but it had to be.

He was buoyed up with the hope of a speedy termination to his troubles, now that Jerry Gleeson had found the all-important witness, Champley. Could that man but be induced to speak the truth, all would be well.

Seton had told him that Champley was to meet Jerry Gleeson that night at the Royal Hotel at eight o'clock, and Ken, anxious to at least have an onlooker's interest in the proceedings, was not far away when the meeting took place.

Ginger Champley followed Gleeson upstairs to his room, Durward Seton also entering the apartment, and closing the door securely.

Champley looked at the stranger doubtfully.

"What's th' caper?" he growled. "Who's th'——"

"It's all right," interposed Jerry. "Mr. Seton, owner of Boomelana Station, is goin' ter have a word with yer. Did yer catch that winner ter-day?"

"Got in at eights," replied Champley. "It was er cert all right. I suppose yer want yer two quid back now?"

"That's all right, lad," said Gleeson. "I did pretty good meself. Now, I'll tell yer what I want without any funny business. Jist have er go at th' whisky, Bluey, an' cock yer lis'ener while I tell me tale."

Nothing loth, the battler, already flushed from strong drink, poured out a liberal draught, and, tossing it off, sat back in his chair to listen.

"One day last spring," commenced Jerry, "not long after th' A.J.C. Derby meeting, I was er passenger be th' Murrubee fer Melbourne. Jist before we pulls out from th' wharf you comes along with er bloke, dead shikkered, dumps him aboard, an' does er quick an' lively mizzle off th' boat again."

"Not me, Jerry! Yer makin' er bloomer, lad. It must er bin——"

"Shut up!" cried Gleeson, "an' listen ter me; yer c'n chip in when I've done."

Champley further indulged his taste for whisky, and grinned at the other's rebuff. "Or right; let er go, old boy," he said.

"I see you on the boat, but didn't say er word," continued Jerry. "It wasn't my business at th' time, but it is now. We want yer ter tell us how yer came ter have th' handlin' of th' bloke yer was with."

"What's th' game? Yer don't get at me, yer know," said Champley. "I heard y'd turned dog, an' was

pimpin' fer th' demons, Jerry, but I ain't no soft snap, old cock !"

"I'm no pimp, an' yer know it !" cried Gleeson. "I'm workin' in th' interest of th' girl that young fellow was to have married, an'——"

"Th' bloke's dead ; so what's th'——" commenced Champley, but he checked himself rather hurriedly.

"So you know what I'm talkin' about, after all," smiled Gleeson. "That's better."

Champley tried some more whisky, smiling also in a maudlin way, and shaking his head.

"That man is supposed to have embezzled a large sum of money, as you must know," said Durward Seton. "We do not believe he was a thief, but that he was the victim of some scoundrel's villainy. We wish to discover who that scoundrel was, so that he might be brought to justice, and an innocent man's name cleared. The fact of Curtis being dead makes no difference. As you had some connection with the affair, you should be able to help us. Do so, and you will be well rewarded."

"Not me !" mumbled Champley. "You've got th' wrong bloke. I don't know nothing."

"Have er bit of common, Bluey !" cried Gleeson. "Don't be er chump ! Yer not too flush, I know ; 'n Mr. Seton ain't particular to er few quid. He'll treat yer better than Doods Dixon."

"What's Doods Dixon got ter do with it ?" growled Champley.

"I know er bit more than yer think," continued Jerry. "I've been on this job a long while now. Dixon got yer ter clear out, didn't he ?"

"D—— him !" angrily cried Champley. "He's gone crook on me, an' I'll give him one ter go on with. I

come back from New Zealand last week, dead broke, 'n he wouldn't stand me er couple er jim, after all I've done fer him. Told me ter get ter hell an' do me worst, he did, th' dog. Here, Mister; how much 'll yer come if I tells yer what yer want ter know?"

"A hundred pounds," said Seton.

"No good ter me."

"Two."

"Make it three, Mister, an' I'll come at it. I might go up meself; I'm takin' er risk, y' know."

"Very well; provided the information is reliable, I'll pay you three hundred pounds. I'll want a sworn affidavit, mind you."

"Right O! I'll put Doods Dixon's pot on, see if I don't; th'——"

Once again did the indignant Champley have recourse to the whisky bottle, cursing Dixon most horribly as he drank.

"Look here!" he exclaimed at last; "give us er tenner down now, 'n I'll give yer th' full strength of how th' thing was done."

"And you will swear an affidavit to-morrow before a magistrate?"

"That's right. I don't like turnin' dog, but this Dixon is er no good cur, anyhow."

"Go ahead, then," said Seton, producing his pocket-book; "you shall have a tenner on account."

With drink-flushed face and blood-shot eyes, Champley rose unsteadily to his feet, and, with drunken earnestness, recited the story of the betrayal of Kendall Curtis, in which he himself had taken a prominent part.

The two men listened in amazement, though to Durward Seton, at least, part of the story was not new. He had heard it from another actor in the drama—Kendall

Curtis himself; yet the fact that the actual perpetrator of the robbery was Horace Wakeman surprised him greatly. Ken had hinted his suspicion that Wakeman had impersonated the old lady at the bank, but the squatter doubted it. Now, however, the truth was out. There was no reason to doubt this fellow's story. Though he was not sober, his words rang true.

"That's all," said Champley, in conclusion; "and it's God's truth, every word. Wakeman was th' bloke responsible, but Dixon was in th' know all th' time."

"And will have to answer for his guilty knowledge," declared Seton, rising. "Now you fix Mr. Champley up for the night, Jerry, for we must not lose him again. We shall want him in the morning."

"Don't fret! I'll be on deck, me boy!" gurgled Ginger. "I'm always ready ter right er wrong, Seton, ole feller. That's me—hic—every time."

Durward Seton left the room and the hotel. He wanted to let Ken know that at last the clouds that had o'ershadowed him were lifting, and that the sun of happiness would shine for him and Vera again very soon now.

He found Ken sitting smoking in the moonlight outside the saleyards. Curtis rose to meet him eagerly.

"Good news, my boy!" cried the squatter, seizing his hand. "Kendall Curtis can come to life again tomorrow!"

Then he told of the interview with Champley, and the promised evidence which would prove Ken's innocence.

"I don't know what to say," stammered Ken, brokenly. "How can I ever repay—ever thank you—sufficiently for——"

"Drop it, boy ! Say nothing just now, at any rate !" exclaimed the squatter. "Let's get the thing finished first. To-morrow this man must make his sworn declaration. Armed with that, and the man himself ready to speak when called upon, we need have no fear. We will go to Sydney, and you can place yourself in Detective Stirling's hands. The rest should be easy. Dixon is doomed. Your innocence will be established, and all will be well with you and Vera."

The two men parted at last, happy in anticipation of the triumph to come ; but the morning brought bitterness.

Champley, hilariously intoxicated, had taken possession of Jerry Gleeson's bed, Jerry having to betake himself to an improvised couch on the floor. Notwithstanding that, he had slumbered all too soundly ; for, on waking he found his bed vacant, and Ginger Champley missing.

Inquiries led to the discovery that Champley, together with some more of the "spieler" fraternity, had left town by the early morning train, in obedience to a polite request from the local police.

Believing that the man, thinking better of his promise to Durward Seton, had gone to Sydney for the purpose of bleeding Foods Dixon, Jerry Gleeson departed for the metropolis by a later train.

To keep faith with his friends, the squatter had to escort the party to Boomelana, while Kea, his spirits once more down to zero, on the advice of Seton, but greatly against his own inclination, resumed his work at the sale-yards.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CHAMPLEY QUIETENED.

DOODS DIXON was seated reading the evening paper, while the food that had been placed before him remained untasted. Dixon was far from satisfied with the way things were going with him. His health was bad, his luck was out, and he had recently discovered that he was an object of interest to the detective police, in the person of Stanley Stirling. He had seen enough to know that, for some reason, this leading light of the force was watching his movements. He wondered what it meant. Stirling, he knew, had been engaged in looking for the man said to be Horace Wakeman, who had attempted to abduct Vera Fenton. Could it be that the detective had a suspicion that he was mixed up with that affair. He feared so, but was confident that it would remain a suspicion only. Here, in the sporting columns of the paper before him was a paragraph that astonished and annoyed him, adding greatly to his mental worry. Hardly believing the evidence of his own eyes, he read it over again as carefully as his agitation would allow :—

“Included in the entries for the Epsom and Metropolitan Handicaps will be noticed the name of Borealis. The public will be surprised to learn that this is a horse believed to have perished when the railway culvert collapsed at Yibbil Creek and the train dashed into the flood in October last. It will be fresh in the memories of our readers that a colt by

Zalinski from Aurora was being conveyed to Sydney for Miss Vera Fenton, in charge of Mr. Doods Dixon, the well-known bookmaker. The horse-box was shattered and hurled into the creek when the disaster occurred. Nothing having been seen of the colt afterwards, it was supposed that it had been drowned and carried away by the torrent. Not so, however. The horse escaped by some means. A traveller, finding him wandering in the hills, took possession, little dreaming of his value, and, no one claiming him, hacked him from place to place. Eventually the man was employed by Mr. Durward Seton, of Boomelana, a keen judge of thoroughbred horses. He admired the colt, and, learning how the man—Gordon by name—came by him, suspected the truth. Curiously enough, Miss Fenton herself came to Boomelana shortly after. On seeing the colt she at once remarked that he bore a great resemblance to her late father's old brood mare, Aurora. Almost sure of the colt's identity, Gordon took him to Wagga and had him trained for the local races. Mr. Seton communicated with Griffiths Thornleigh, of Caulfield, who bred the Zalinski colt and handed him over to Doods Dixon for Miss Fenton. Thornleigh went to Wagga, saw the horse, and identified him at once as the supposed dead son of Zalinski. Borealis is that horse. He won the River Cup in brilliant style, though not quite wound up, and will run for Miss Fenton at the A.J.C. Spring Meeting, carrying the well-remembered colours of the late Roger Fenton."

"I don't believe it," muttered Dixon, rising and pacing the floor. "It can't be true! It's an infernal fabrication, a conspiracy to ring some horse in. Durward Seton is above suspicion, they say. Bah! I've yet to meet that sort in this infernal game. I wish to Heaven I'd never touched it!"

He resumed his seat, only to spring up again, and begin his walk once more.

"God! If it should be true!" he cried, beating his hands together. "What a hold on Vera it gives Seton! How grateful she will be to him! Curse him! I swear he shall not get her and live. Vera Fenton is mine by right of——"

His frenzied mutterings were interrupted by the entrance of his man servant. This was the only person he now allowed about the place. He attended faith-

fully to his master's wants, and held his tongue. He was a treasure, indeed, to a man of Dixon's present mode of life, and his services were well rewarded.

"Well, what do you want?" snapped Dixon.

"A man wants to see you, sir," said the fellow, meekly. "Name, Champley."

Dixon started slightly; then replied: "Oh, show the d—— pest in, and make yourself scarce."

Champley, shabby, unshorn, and besotted, entered the room. Taking a chair unasked, he faced the scowling bookmaker.

"Ah! Doods!" he sighed; "this is something like, old boy! No place like home, after all. I'm thinkin' of turnin' respectable meself, an' settlin' down. I'm tired of bein' a roamer; I want ter——".

"Oh, dry up!" cried Dixon, angrily. "What is it you're after now? Didn't I tell yer not ter come botherin' me again? I treated yer liberally. Not satisfied, you returned from New Zealand to try and get more blackmail. I wouldn't stand yer then, an' I won't now. I'm not afraid of what you know, Champley; remember that. Get out of this, and don't bother me again, or——"

"Now, don't go crook, Doods; don't go crook!" protested Champley. "Listen ter me, lad; it's fer yer own sake I'm here. On'y fer me conscience 'n th' love I bears yer, I mighter bin er few hundred strong to-night; but me conscience, Doods, ole boy, smote me hard. I couldn't do it—couldn't turn dorg on me ole cobber——"

"Whatever are you talking about? D—— you! come ter th' point!" hissed Dixon.

"Give us er chance," said Champley; "an' if there's er drop of whisky——"

Dixon produced the required stimulant, and his visitor went on :

"I've bin in th' enemy's camp, Doods, an' I was tempted bad, I don't mind tellin' yer. Yer see, owin' ter me misfortune, I've had ter battle through th' country to earn er honest livin'. I got ter Wagga fer th' races. Me an' Knocker Eager an' er couple more. I'm doin' er bit with th' cards, when who should spot me but Jerry Gleeson, th' bloke what's bin so anxious ter find me. He sez, 'Here, Bluey, have this couple er quid on Borealis in th' big race, an' come an' see me ter-night at th' Royal Hotel.' I gets in at eights, an' strike me stiff ! this Borealis lobs it out. He's er bonzer, Doods, an' don't you forgit it. What's that ?"

"Nothing; go on," snarled Dixon, who had uttered an oath.

"I draws me little eighteen jim, an' I turns up at th' Royal that night. Jerry takes me ter his room, an' er squatter fr'm—er——"

"Boomelana !" prompted Dixon.

"That's right, Doods; bloke with lots er brass. Well, he comes along, too. Surprisin' ter find Jerry in such toffs' company, ain't it, Doods ?"

"Oh! hurry up with th' tale, can't yer ?" growled Dixon, impatiently.

"Right O !" said the other; "I'll do me best. What d'ye think, Doods ? Knowin' me weakness, they induces th' shikker; fills me up, an' starts pumpin' me about that Curtis affair. Dead crook, wasn't it. I didn't come at it; so th' squatter bloke chucks me a tenner. 'Here,' he sez, 'cop that ter go on with. Make a sworn affidavit of what yer know, an' I'll give yer three hundred cash down.' Well, Doods, I don't mind tellin' yer. I was tempted an' hein' on th' shikker, I

nearly come at it. 'Right O! me boy,' I sez, 'I'll do it.' He leaves it at that, arrangin' ter fix things up in th' mornin'. After a few more drinks with Jerry, I goes ter sleep in Jerry's bed. Near daylight I wakes up, an' thinks it over. 'No,' I sez, 'not me. I won't go back on me ole cobbler, Doods; I couldn't do it. Besides, there's one er two things th' Johns has got against me, down below. No; I'll clear out, an' see ole Doods, an' let him know th' danger he's in.' So I ups an' sneaks out unbeknown ter Jerry, an', gettin' hold er Knocker, me an' him catches th' early train ter Goulburn. I got on th' pot again there," sighed Champley, helping himself to more whisky. "Drink's er curse, Doods, ain't it? Here's luck. As I was sayin', I got on th' pot; done me lovely twenty-eight quid, an' had ter foot it ter Sydney; an' here I am at last, Doods, ter——"

"Now, look here!" demanded Dixon, savagely, "what did you tell those men about that affair?"

"Nothing, Doods; not er word! May I be struck dead if I did! I wouldn't turn dog——"

"I don't believe yer!" interposed the bookmaker. "Wouldn't turn dog! No; because yer never were anything better than a cur! It's yer own miserable skin yer afraid of, or that something 'd crop up if yer showed yer nose in er police court that'd send yer along! It's not me yer thought about. Y've come ter me, thinkin' ter get er bigger price than Seton offered, an' if I don't come——"

"Doods, you wrong me!" cried Champley, in a hurt tone of voice.

"Bah!" sneered Dixon, contemptuously. Then, altering his tone, continued: "All right; I suppose we'll have ter come ter terms; it's no use rowing. I'll give you five hundred now——"

"Doods ! I always said yer was er white——"

"Five hundred now," continued Dixon, "an' when Momus wins th' Epsom, another monkey. How'll that suit ?"

"Good enough, ole boy ! an' never er word will Bluey Champley ever squeak ; but will Momus win th' Epsom, Doods ?"

"Yes ; I'm backing it for every penny I can raise, an' I'm going ter make a cert of it. If Momus gets beat I'll be a pauper !"

"You must think it's good goods," said Champley ; "but I wouldn't empty out on it, Doods. Nothing's er cert, yer know, an' this here Borealis is er bonzer, take it fr'm me."

The mention of Borealis angered Dixon. He uttered an imprecation that startled even such a hardened battler as Ginger Champley, and left the room.

Returning soon, he made a pretence of getting his cheque-book. Passing at the back of his visitor, he bent over and dropped something into the man's glass. Then obtaining another glass, he poured out a drink for himself, filling Champley's glass also.

"Have one with me, Champley," he said ; "then I'll write out the cheque."

Champley, nothing loth, drank the whisky with a "Good luck, Doods !" while Dixon, smiling sardonically, drank also, saying :

"Pleasant dreams, Champley ! May that monkey do you lots of good—when you—get it !"

Champley gazed at his companion in stupid wonderment for a moment ; then his head drooped, his limbs relaxed, and he rolled from the chair to the floor.

"Pah !" sneered Dixon, spurning him with his foot. "Such carrion is not worth keeping alive. Were it not

that my hands are already stained, I would—— Never mind; your power to annoy is finished for the present, at any rate !”

He whistled, and his man appeared.

“Get hold of this,” he said, indicating the unconscious form at his feet, “and help me carry it to the loft over the stable. We’ll have him lodging there for a while. You’ll have to see that he does not get away, Langton; give him plenty of whisky; let him wallow in it, and he’ll be happy.”

They bore Champley from the house to the old brick stable, and up into the loft, where they left him, bolting the door leading thereto securely as they withdrew.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN INTERVIEW WITH DOODS DIXON.

ONCE more Jerry Gleeson had to confess himself beaten. Champley had vanished. He was traced to Goulburn, his travelling mate was found, but the all-important Ginger could not be discovered. Jerry was disgusted with himself, and what he termed his "dead crook luck." Of what good was the knowledge they now possessed if they could not produce the authority for their strange story? Very little.

Realising his helplessness, Gleeson, with the consent of Durward Seton, sought the professional assistance of Stanley Stirling. He told the detective of the work that he had been engaged in for months past, and what he had found out regarding the affair of Kendall Curtis. Stirling was astonished at the story.

"Well, so help me bob!" he exclaimed. "And not a thought ever entered my thick head that Curtis might be innocent! I believed him guilty from the jump, but from what you say, the poor devil was the victim of that clever scoundrel, Horace Wakeman, assisted by Dixon!"

"That's right," said Jerry. "What's best to be done now?"

"We can't do much for Curtis, unfortunately," replied the detective, "except to clear his name; but we

can get hold of at least one of the men who ruined him. Dixon will have to face the music over this lot."

"But Champley, the man who can put his pot on, has reneged," protested Jerry. "Until we get him——"

"We must find him. In the meantime, what about this man Farrell you say had a hand in the job? If he's in Goulburn Gaol, I will see what I can learn from him for a start."

So Stirling went to work actively; but no progress was made. Farrell was found to be mentally afflicted in the gaol hospital. Nothing could be learned from him in his present state. There was nothing for it but to find Champley, which, according to Stirling, should not be a very difficult undertaking.

The weeks went by without result. Kendall Curtis's impatience grew more unbearable daily. At last he resolved to be patient no longer. Of what use was it for him to keep in the background, letting the days go by with no visible prospect of a termination of his miserable exile? As well be a prisoner in reality as suffer this life of suspense and uncertainty.

So, when the time came for the taking of Borealis to Sydney to finish his preparation for the forthcoming events, Ken made up his mind to accompany Muir McDonald, and help care for the horse during his stay at Randwick.

"I'm prepared to run the risk of recognition," he said, when talking the matter over with Durward Seton. "If Vera and my best friends failed to recognise me here, there is not much to fear on that score. In any case, if Champley does not turn up, I will not delay longer than the Spring Meeting. That done with, I intend to strike a blow at Doods Dixon by accusing him of the murder of Arnold Duff. Then, having

declared myself, I will be prepared to stand my trial, trusting to the facts gleaned by Jerry Gleeson to establish my innocence. If I fail; then, at least, there is an end to this torturing suspense."

"As you will, boy," replied the squatter, kindly. "I think that course as good as any, and I am sure right will prevail at the end."

In due course Muir McDonald and Kendall Curtis, together with Borealis, arrived at Randwick, and took up their quarters at the Epsom Hotel. The trainer was quite agreeable to Ken's company, for the horse always seemed more satisfied when his old master was near.

The papers made special reference to the arrival of what they were pleased to term the sensational horse from Wagga, and sporting writers interviewed Ken on the subject of the finding of Borealis. Ken, however, was not to be pumped, and the scribes went away unrewarded.

For some reason Borealis did not find much favour with the *habitués* of the training track. McDonald did not attempt anything in the way of record-breaking with the colt, with the result that, after a few days, Borealis did his gallops without attracting much attention.

The weights had been declared some time before McDonald had left Wagga. Borealis was allotted 7st. 10lb., a weight the trainer considered a mere nothing for his charge.

Momus, with just a stone more, was favourite from the appearance of the weights. Doods Dixon had backed his horse in a sensational manner, as if there was no doubt about the result. Report said, and truly in this instance, that, in the event of Momus failing Dixon would lose his all.

This did not dismay other owners. Many horses were backed heavily; but did a bookmaker stretch a point on Momus, money was at once forthcoming from Dixon's commissioner to further support the favourite.

Durward Seton's friends had invested rather freely on Borealis, but the colt still remained at an outside price, Ken, who had won something over a hundred pounds at Wagga, speculating to the extent of £2,000 to £80.

Little did he think on the previous Epsom Day, as he watched Momus work the ruin of Roger Fenton, that twelve months hence he himself would be depending on a horse in that self-same race to provide him with the means of confounding his enemies, and winning him a fresh start in life. But so it was; for to Borealis he looked to shatter the fortunes of Doods Dixon, and bring to himself the wherewithal to fight his case, and establish his innocence. Of ever finding Champley he began to despair. In his shabby clothes, with his untrimmed beard and hair, Ken mixed with the *habitués* of gaffing schools, and the army of battlers who, somehow, exist on the sport of horseracing, hoping to meet that man who could do so much for him. But never did he see the face he sought—a face which, though he had seen it but once, he felt sure he would always remember. Jerry Gleeson and Stirling were no more successful. Champley had seemingly been spirited away. There was nothing left but to fight Dixon without him. Ken resolved to do so. The Epsom over, he would come out boldly as Kendall Curtis, whatever the consequence.

Doods Dixon, as the all-important Epsom day approached, was a constant morning visitor at Randwick. He saw the man who had restored Vera Fenton's horse

to her there every morning, and seemed interested in the commonplace country-looking fellow.

"A poverty-stricken, poor devil, dependent on the bounty of Durward Seton, I suppose," thought Dixon. "He would leap at the chance of making a rise."

Dixon tried to persuade himself that Borealis had no chance of beating Momus. Still he was somewhat superstitious, and was haunted by a dread that such a thing might happen as a judgment on him. If he could buy this Gordon over, no doubt a means could be found whereby whatever chance Borealis possessed would be effectually removed.

Accordingly, to Ken's great surprise, one morning his enemy spoke to him. Ken, keeping himself under control, answered Dixon shortly.

"So, you're the man that found Borealis?" asked Dixon.

"That's right," said Ken, gruffly.

"Lucky fellow ! I suppose, if he wins the Epsom, you're made for life ?"

"No chance," drawled Ken, stupidly.

"I should like to hear the yarn about how you found the horse," continued Dixon. "I'm rather interested, as I was in charge of him at the time of the disaster."

"There's nothing in it. Don't yer read th' papers ? It's all been in print, Mr. Dixon," replied Ken, moving away.

"But, look here, Gordon, it wouldn't hurt you to look in at my place to-night for a yarn, would it now ?"

Ken turned and faced the bookmaker. An angry reply was on his lips, but he checked its utterance.

"I'll be there," he said.

"That's right," muttered Dixon ; "and don't tell any of your crowd about it."

"I understand," replied Ken, and Dixon left him.

Curtis saw Durward Seton later in the day, and told him what had happened.

"I don't think he recognised you," said Seton. "Do as you think best, only be careful; he's a dangerous man, boy."

"I know it," returned Ken, "and I'll be ready for any emergency. You may be sure it's some scheme with regard to Borealis that he has in his mind."

Curtis made his way to the well-remembered cottage that night, and bitter-sweet memories filled his thoughts as he walked through the little front garden, once lovingly tended by Vera Fenton, but now a mass of weeds.

Doods Dixon was expecting him, and the spirit decanter stood ready to tempt the visitor.

"Sit down, Mr. Gordon," said the bookmaker, "and try a drop of whisky."

"No, thanks; don't touch it," replied Ken.

"Sensible man! Don't meet many with your strength of mind nowadays, Mr. Gordon."

Ken made no reply to this flattering remark, and Dixon wasted no more time in preliminaries.

"About this Borealis," he said, in a low, confidential tone of voice. "Are you sure everything is right—no mistaken identity, or anything of that sort?"

"No mistake."

"Now, look here, Mr. Gordon, don't be afraid to speak freely to me; I will not betray your confidence, and will reward you handsomely for anything you might tell me. Now, supposing this Borealis was not the Zalinski colt at all, but some other horse which, for purposes best known——"

Ken, with an angry flush, half sprang to his feet.

"Now, be calm!" protested Dixon. "No offence meant at all. Mistakes have been made, you know, Mr. Gordon. I would give——"

"Damn you! there's no mistake," cried Ken, throwing discretion to the winds. "No mistake, I tell you! I saw the horse struggle from the water that night, and——"

"Then you knew long before you met Seton that you were illegally in possession of a valuable racehorse. You're lucky that you were not called upon to face a criminal charge, young man."

"Never mind what I knew!" cried Curtis, thoroughly roused. "I'll tell you something else I saw that night, after the colt had landed from the flood, Mr. Dixon."

"Yes; what's that?" Dixon spoke calmly, but a strange dread had gripped his heart, and increased the pallor of his cheeks.

"A murder!"

"What!"

The word was gasped by the bookmaker as if in deadly fear of something invisible to his visitor.

"I'm in bad health," he murmured, apologetically, pouring out a glass of spirits. "Easily upset, yer know. What were you saying?"

"I saw two men engaged in a death struggle. One held the other by the throat. He was choking him. I made to run to the scene. As I did, the murderer cast his victim from him, then hurled the body into the flood. The man with the brand of Cain upon him rushed from the scene of the crime. He fled past where I stood, watching. I could have seized him did I so desire. The moon shone on his death-like face. I looked, and the memory of that face is with me yet.

I will know it again if we meet, on earth or in the life to come. It was a face such as——”

“Keep back !” screamed Dixon. “Don’t point at me like that, man ! What do you mean——”

Ken had risen, and was pointing at the distorted face before him. The bookmaker trembled as if an ague had gripped him. Suddenly he sprang at Curtis, with hands outstretched, as if to grasp him, cursing brokenly. Then, as Ken backed away, with his hand on the revolver he always carried, a diversion occurred.

From without came cries of help, uttered in a terror-laden voice. A peal of demoniacal laughter followed ; then a door was burst open, a white-faced man staggered into the room.

“He will kill me !” he cried. “He has escaped ! He will murder me !”

Outside, that awful laughter rose again, followed by incoherent blasphemies, as from one in the horrors. Ere the door could be locked, a second man was in the room. A dirty, dishevelled, ragged, emaciated, chattering dipsomaniac. Despite his pitiful condition, Ken recognised the man he had seen at Wagga with Jerry Gleeson—Ginger Champley.

“Ha ! Ha !” he yelled. “Doods Dixon ! Doods Dixon ! That’s th’ man I want ! Where is he ? I’ll tear th’——”

Dixon seemed to recover some of his self-possession. Grasping a heavy chair, he raised it above his head, and rushed at the delirious man. Ken sprang between them, revolver in hand.

“Stand back ?” he ordered ; and, as Dixon recoiled from the weapon, he seized Champley, dragged him from the room, and out of the house.

Running down the garden, two men met them.

"What's up ?" cried one, and Ken was relieved to recognise the voice of Jerry Gleeson.

"Here's the man you want !" gasped Ken. "Ginger Champléy !"

"By G—, so it is !" burst from Gleeson and his companion, Stanley Stirling.

"What's been up, Bluey, old chap ?" asked Jerry.

Champléy did not answer. He had fallen to the ground, and was foaming at the mouth, in a fit, at their feet.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

UNMASKED AT LAST.

DERBY DAY once more. Again Randwick was thronged with many thousands of Australia's best and most manly men, and beautiful women. Healthy, sun-kissed, sport-loving sons and daughters of a bright and glorious land. Happy, laughing faces on every side. Looking at the merry throng, one would imagine that no sorrow had touched anyone there during the year that was gone. Yet many there were who had known sadness; but to-day, all was forgotten in the gladness of the moment, or hidden so that it might not mar the joy that was all around.

Vera Fenton was there, with Lena Walton, her mother, Durward Seton, and Fred Duncan. Her face was wreathed in smiles, for did she not expect to win the Epsom; yet deep in her heart the great sorrow of her life was concealed. She could not but remember that on last Derby Day both her father and lover were alive. Now, what would it matter to them did Borealis win the Epsom, and bring about the ruin of the man who had so wronged her and them?

Kendall Curtis was not far away, though still in the guise of Harry Gordon. He was happy, despite his troubles and trials; for this is the last day of his en-

forced silence. To-night, no matter what the day might bring forth, Kendall Curtis would live again.

Two men, beside Durward Seton, knew his secret now. One was Stanley Stirling. Ken had told him all, and the detective was eager to act, but Curtis had prevailed upon him to wait a little longer. Champley, hovering 'twixt life and death from starvation and alcoholic poisoning, was not yet fit to say much; so Stirling reluctantly held his hand.

The other who knew that Kendall Curtis lived was Doods Dixon. During that interview, when Ken had told of the murder of Arnold Duff, the truth had flashed on the wretched man. Murder was in his heart then, but he was foiled. Curtis had escaped, and, with him, Champley. They would try to bring about his downfall, he knew. That was only natural. Well, if Momus did not win, what did it matter? But, if the horse did win, let them do their worst. He would have money to fight and beat them—aye! and win Vera Fenton also, in spite of all! Such were his thoughts as he paced nervously about the betting ring, impatiently waiting for the race to start that was to decide his fate. He saw Kendall Curtis in the stall with Borealis, and was tempted to cry out and denounce him, as he did that day at Caulfield; but the thought of the awful secret Curtis held with regard to Arnold Duff restrained him.

The opening events were finished with, and betting on the Epsom was now proceeding briskly. Momus was a hot favourite. His owner had backed him heavily, and the public had followed his example, so that the horse was quoted at a very short price. Durward Seton's party were in no way dismayed. Borealis was well, his trainer and jockey confident, as was his

pretty owner. Vera would not hear of her beauty's defeat; and, sympathy being with her on account of what she had suffered, many hoped that Borealis would succeed.

Of the numerous other candidates, many were looked on as likely to win, and were backed accordingly, Sir Wallace, Australie, and Sunny South being especially fancied; but the greatest interest was taken in the meeting of Momus and Borealis.

At length all preliminaries over, the horses faced the starting barrier, the great crowd gazing across at the distant line of bright-coloured jackets in hushed expectancy. Doods Dixon, his hands twitching nervously, peered through his coloured goggles, watching Momus intently. Beneath him, on the stand, Durward Seton, with Vera and her friends, were chatting gaily as they watched the horses through their race glasses, and near by, the man called Harry Gordon, feasted his eyes on Vera Fenton, concerned with nothing for the moment but her happiness.

"They're off!" That well-known cry of the race-course arose from flat and paddock alike, as the spring was released and the starting barrier flew upward.

The race had started. A horse, whose rider wore a bright red jacket, was out in front. "Momus!" cried the crowd exultantly. The favourite had been lucky at the start, and his backers crowed in anticipation. But soon the field closed up. Momus was steadied, and another horse showed the way along past Kensington. They were coming with a rattle; but "Where is Borealis?" cried someone. Curtis, whose eyes were glued on the violet and blue of his champion, answered:

"He's coming through on the rails! See! If he gets a clear run, he must win!"

"He'll eat 'em !" cried Jerry Gleeson, excitedly. "Come on, you beauty ! It's any odds on Borealis !"

But Jerry shouted too soon. A sudden closing in of the rushing horses, and Borealis was blocked.

"They've settled him !" wailed Jerry. "See, he's knocked back last !"

True enough, Borealis was in the rear, seemingly out of the hunt, as the field swept into the straight to the accompaniment of cries of "Momus ! Momus ! The favourite wins !"

Momus dashed to the front when once into the home stretch, but Sunny South and Monte Man were pressing him closely. The whips were cracking now in earnest. It was to be no easy victory. Suddenly a roar was heard from the spellbound multitude. "What's that on the outside ?" was shouted, excitedly.

"Borealis ! Borealis !" screamed Jerry Gleeson, throwing his hat on high. "Come on, you bute !" And the crowd takes up the cry, "Borealis !"

"Yes, right on the outside, young Shirley, crouching low upon his wither, came Borealis. He was galloping like a piece of machinery, and making his rivals appear but sluggards in comparison. One by one the beaten horses were left behind, but the winning post was near, and the race not yet over. Momus and Monte, locked together, whips and spurs moving in unison, raced desperately in front. Could Borealis catch them ? Silence fell upon the onlookers as they looked, open-mouthed, at the battling racehorses. Then, when at last the cool-headed youngster on Borealis drew his whip, and, in response, his gallant mount bounded forward in one last supreme effort, a great cry burst from a thousand throats, "Borealis wins !" With long.

sweeping strides, the Zalniski colt overtook the favourite. A brief and brilliant struggle, and all was over.

A moment of doubtful silence; then again that roar of triumph, as hats flew into the air, and for the moment men went mad with joy.

"Borealis !"

Yes, the number was up; the colt had won, and Roger Fenton was, in part, avenged.

Crushed and angry, his body trembling as with an ague, Dixon hurried through the cheering crowd. He was ruined utterly, but an insane desire to attack his enemies was in his mind.

Into the weighing enclosure he forced his way, as Borealis was brought in by the clerk of the course. Above the cheers Dixon's voice, high-pitched and shrill, was heard, and the crowd listened in wonder.

"I protest ! I demand an inquiry ! What horse is this so-called Borealis, guaranteed by a thief and murderer ? Aye ! I know what I am saying. There he stands ! Gordon, they call him, but I know him to be Kendall Curtis !"

He pointed a long finger at Ken, who, with Seton and Stanley Stirling stood at the head of Borealis.

"Yes !" screams Dixon, hysterically, "Kendall Curtis, the supposed dead man. Thief ! Murderer ! I call on the police to seize him ! See, he cannot deny it !"

"I do not deny it !" cried Ken. "All the world may know it ! I am Kendall Curtis, as this man says ; but neither thief nor murderer. My hands are clean ; but this man's are stained with the blood of Arnold Duff. I saw him choke——"

With a sudden movement, and screaming like a maniac, Dixon sprang at Curtis. His hands clawed at Ken's throat. In a moment the two were locked to-

gether, struggling on the ground. Curtis proved too strong for his raving antagonist. Tearing himself free, he rose to his knees, holding Dixon down; but, as he looked at the struggling man's face, he started back with a cry of horror. The coloured glasses had gone, the black beard seemed torn from its roots, and, looking up at him was a livid, cadaverous face, with large bright eyes, and cheeks covered with a snow-white stubble, a face, though distorted and altered, that he recognised instantly.

"Hoface Wakeman !" he gasped; and the amazed crowd drew back as if afraid.

The man ceased his struggles. The name seemed to calm him.

"So you have found me out at last," he said, weakly. "Ah, well, what does it matter now ? The play is finished; take me off. If it had not been for the mad love I bore that girl, no power on earth would have probed my secret. Only two men guessed it, and they did not live to betray me. Take me away, I say. Horace Wakeman and Doods Dixon will act no more !"

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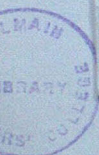
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